CONFERENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

BRUSSELS

24 AND 25 FEBRUARY 1998

UNITED NATIONS

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CONTENTS

		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	OPENING MEETING AND HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING	3
	STATEMENTS BY:	
	ERIK DERYCKE, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF BELGIUM	3
	HENNADIY U. UDOVENKO, PRESIDENT OF THE FIFTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY	5
	KOFI ANNAN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS (STATEMENT DELIVERED BY SIR KIERAN PRENDERGAST, UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS)	6
	IBRA DEGUÈNE KA, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE	7
	AZZEDINE LARAKI, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE	8
	SAID KAMAL, ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES	9
	CARLOS LEMOS SIMMONDS, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA (ON BEHALF OF ERNESTO SAMPER PIZANO, PRESIDENT OF COLOMBIA AND CHAIRMAN OF THE MOVEMENT OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES	12
	YASSER ARAFAT, CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION AND PRESIDENT OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY	14
III.	RESUMED HIGH LEVEL-PLENARY MEETING	17
	STATEMENTS BY:	
	SADOK FAYALA, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TUNISIA	17
	CHERIF YOUNOUSS DIAITÉ, AMBASSADOR, DIRECTOR OF THE CABINET OF THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SENEGAL (ON BEHALF OF ABDOU DIOUF, PRESIDENT OF SENEGAL)	18
	L. N. SISULU, DEPUTY MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS OF SOUTH AFRICA (ON BEHALF OF NELSON MANDELA, PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA)	20
	FARUK LOGOGLU, DEPUTY UNDER-SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TURKEY	21
	MOUNIR ZAHRAN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF EGYPT TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA (ON BEHALF OF AHRE MOUSSA, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF EGYPT)	22
	AHMAD MOHAMMED ALI, PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK	24
	SIMBARASHE S. MUMBENGEGWI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ZIMBABWE TO THE EUROPEAN UNION (ON BEHALF OF ROBERT G. MUGABE, PRESIDENT OF ZIMBABWE AND CHAIRMAN OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY)	27

PAGE

NASSIR ALASSAF, AMBASSADOR OF SAUDI ARABIA TO BELGIUM
(ON BEHALF OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE SAUD AL-FAYSAL,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SAUDI ARABIA 29

IV. GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS 30

PROMOTING THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE -
A KEY TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE NEED TO IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
AND TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS: THE CURRENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

STATEMENTS BY EMINENT PERSONS:

SHULAMIT ALONI, MERETZ PARTY, FORMER MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF ISRAEL 30

NABIL SHAATH, MINISTER OF PLANNING AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION,
PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY 32

HARRY G. BARNES, JR., DIRECTOR, CONFLICT RESOLUTION
AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMS, THE CARTER CENTER 34

MICHAEL HINDLEY, MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (LABOUR, UNITED KINGDOM),
CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION FOR EURO-ARAB COOPERATION 35

HENRY SIEGMAN, DIRECTOR, UNITED STATES/MIDDLE EAST PROJECT AND SENIOR FELLOW,
COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS 38

MOHAMED ABDELLAH, CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE OF
THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY OF EGYPT 40

V. CLOSING MEETING 41

JEAN DE RUYT, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF MULTILATERAL POLICY OF THE
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF BELGIUM 41

M. NASSER AL-KIDWA, PERMANENT OBSERVER OF PALESTINE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS 42

IBRA DEGUÈNE KA, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE
EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE 43

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE ORGANIZERS 44

VII. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS 45

I. INTRODUCTION

Objectives of the Conference

A high-level Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. The Conference was held at Brussels on 24 and 25 February 1998.

In convening the Conference, the three organizers expressed great concern at the continuing serious situation faced by the peace process in the Middle East, and at the growing hardships and hopelessness of the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. They expressed their belief that efforts to achieve a political settlement would succeed only if they were accompanied by policies designed to restore faith in a just solution based on internationally accepted principles and to promote improved living conditions and economic cooperation and development, thus giving hope for a better future not only to Palestinians but also to all the peoples of the region.

The organizers stressed that, in that spirit, they had decided to redouble their efforts to respond constructively to the situation and to help the peace process move forward. The objective of the Conference was to address the most pressing issues in that regard and to promote intensified international action in support of the attainment of Palestinian rights and for the success of the peace efforts.

Organization of the Conference

The Conference was attended by 102 Governments, 10 United Nations organs, agencies and bodies, 8 intergovernmental organizations, 47 non-governmental organizations and 3 special guests. It was also attended by delegations of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, headed by Ibra Deguène Ka, Committee Chairman; the Organization of the Islamic Conference, headed by Azzedine Laraki, Secretary-General; and the League of Arab States, headed by Said Kamal, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs (see Section VII for the list of participants).

The Conference consisted of an opening meeting and a high-level plenary meeting, and a general exchange of views, with the participation of a number of eminent persons.

At the opening meeting and the high-level plenary meeting, held on the morning of 24 February, statements were made by: Erik Derycke, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium on behalf of the host country; Hennadiy U. Udovenko, President of the General Assembly; Sir Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who read out a message from Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General; Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Azzedine Laraki, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; Said Kamal, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; Carlos Lemos Simmonds, Vice-President of Colombia, on behalf of Ernesto Samper Pizano, Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries; and Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

In the resumed high-level plenary meeting, on the afternoon of 24 February, statements were made by Sadok Fayala, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia; Cherif Younouss Diaité, Director of the Cabinet of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal; L. N. Sisulu, Deputy Minister of Home Affairs of South Africa; Faruk Logoglu, Deputy Under-Secretary for Political Affairs of Turkey; Mounir Zahran, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva; Ahmad Mohammed Ali, President of the Islamic Development Bank; Simbarashe S. Mumbengegwi, Ambassador of Zimbabwe and Permanent Representative to the European Union; and Nassir Alassaf, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Belgium.

Beginning on the afternoon of 24 February, and continuing on 25 February, a general exchange of views was held on the following themes:

- Promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people—a key to peace in the Middle East;

- The need to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people and to promote economic and social development;

- The Middle East peace process: the current situation and prospects.

The following eminent persons made statements in the general exchange of views: Shulamit Aloni, Former Minister of Education of Israel and member of the Meretz Party; Nabil Shaath, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority; Harry G. Barnes, Jr., Director of Conflict Resolution and Human Rights Programmes of the Carter Center; Michael Hindley, Member of the European Parliament and Co-Chairman of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation; Henry Siegman, Director of the United States/Middle East Project and Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations; and Mohamed Abdellah, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the People's Assembly of Egypt. Representatives of the following Governments and United Nations bodies also made statements: Cyprus, Ukraine, Ghana, Russian Federation, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Guyana, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Qatar, China, Viet Nam, Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

At the closing meeting, held on the afternoon of 25 February, statements were made by Jean de Ruyt, Director-General of Multilateral Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, M. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who read out a document containing concluding remarks drafted by the three organizers. The document was issued as a press release (see section VI).

The present report contains the full text of statements made by invited speakers in accordance with the programme circulated at the Conference.

II. OPENING MEETING AND HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING

ERIK DERYCKE
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium

It gives me great pleasure to welcome to Brussels the participants in this United Nations conference organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States.

I wish to extend particular greetings to Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, whom I am delighted to see again in Brussels.

I should like to take the opportunity afforded by the opening of this Conference to emphasize the attachment of my country, and of our partners in the European Union, to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

When we look back and analyse the development of the peace process, we are bound to say that, for the peoples of the region, moments of hope have been followed by periods of deep discouragement.

The future of the Palestinian people and its relations with the Hebrew State have for many years been a central concern of national leaders and public opinion both in Belgium and throughout the rest of Europe.

Suffice it to mention here the very important Venice Declaration of 1980, in which the then nine members of the Union called for recognition of the right to existence and security of all the States in the region, including Israel, for justice for all peoples, and for the exercise of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people.

It was also with some optimism that we followed in October 1991 the work of the Madrid Conference, the mandate of which was to attain a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The principle of the exchange of the territories occupied by Israel in the course of the various conflicts against guaranteed peace with its Arab neighbours is the essential element of the peace process.

The Madrid Conference defined the machinery of bilateral peace talks. The Moscow Conference established a forum for multilateral negotiations to accompany and underpin those talks.

The structure for the creation of more harmonious relations between all the States in the region has been completed by the holding of a number of regional economic conferences.

As you know, the Israeli-Palestinian dimension of this process has gone through two sterile years since the Madrid Conference.

How gratified we were to learn in the summer of 1993 of the holding in Norway of secret negotiations that were to lead to mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). That recognition made possible the signing in Washington, D.C., of the Declaration of Principles that laid down a series of basic rules intended to lead after a period of five years of limited Palestinian autonomy to a final status for the Palestinian territories.

You will also remember the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area that made possible the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman Arafat's return to the territories.

Great hope was born of the extraordinary handshake between Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat on the White House lawn. It was, therefore, with enthusiasm that Belgium and its partners in the European Union decided to embark firmly on a partnership for peace.

There are many aspects to this partnership by the Union aimed at the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute: let me just mention the support for the holding of the Palestinian elections, the financial assistance—which, in the case of Belgium, exceeded 1 billion francs for the period 1993-1997—and the appointment of a special envoy for the Middle East peace process, Miguel Angel Moratinos.

The momentum engendered by the Oslo Accords was, however, short-lived. Confidence was severely undermined by the terrible events of late 1995 and early 1996.

I would mention in particular the tragic death of Prime Minister Rabin, assassinated by an enemy of peace, and the murderous attacks in February and March 1996 in Israel.

The signing of the Hebron Agreement brought with it a note of hope, but, more than a year after that accord, we cannot but express our great disappointment at the absence of any meaningful results.

We are very worried by this blockage of the situation, which could lead, in time, to serious trouble in the region. There is keen disenchantment and bitterness among the Palestinian population. The unemployment, the absence of medium-term prospects, the drastic fall in living standards in the territories, and unilateral measures such as the continued expansion of settlements are all factors that may give rise to an explosion.

Despite the standstill in the peace process, Belgium and its European partners remain very much attached to the Madrid and Oslo process. Although it has now been bogged down for almost a year, that process remains the only option for attaining a just and lasting overall peace.

We welcome the fact that the British Presidency has chosen to make the Middle East peace process one of the priorities of its foreign policy during its term of office. We are, in any event, determined to make the necessary diplomatic efforts to support the negotiations and reduce the differences between the parties.

Revitalization of the peace process is an urgent necessity and should concern both the complete implementation of those provisions of the interim agreements that have not yet been put into effect and the resumption of the talks on the final status of the occupied territories.

In addition to a significant contribution on technical issues, such as the opening of an airport and the construction of a seaport in the Gaza Strip and establishment of transit arrangements to ensure safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Belgium considers that the Fifteen can offer useful cooperation in the sphere of security. In this regard, the European Union is preparing a programme of assistance to help the Palestinian Authority in combating terrorism.

Also, as the very recent visit to the region by Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, showed, neither Europe nor Belgium can remain indifferent to the increasing degradation of the economic and the social situation in the occupied territories. That situation worries us, for it is consistent neither with the following of a proper path to peace nor with the strengthening of the security necessary for the establishment of that peace.

The renewal of the European Union's aid when the five-year programme expires in October 1998 remains essential for the improvement of the economic and social development of the occupied territories. Making the best use of that aid will, however, be impossible unless the obstacles to the movement of people and goods are removed.

History will judge severely those who fail to seize an historic opportunity to enable their people to live in peace, to enjoy the dividends of peace and to forget the antagonisms, strains and conflicts of the past and make optimum use of the available human, cultural, economic and social potential and so transform the region into a zone of prosperity and well-being.

However, current events, and here I refer to the Iraqi crisis, show us that that goal seems far from having been achieved.

I wish, nonetheless, to reaffirm that, in Belgium's view, the will of the international community and of the parties to a given conflict must continue to be manifested above all through diplomacy.

I wish to express here the hope that the parties will do all they can to save the peace process, which is being seriously harmed by the present stagnation. I call upon the parties to honour the engagements they contracted in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo process.

It is essential to get out of the present impasse. The fate of present and future generations, which have the right to live in peace, is at stake.

It remains for me to express, on behalf of the Belgian Government, the hope that the discussions among the participants in this Conference will contribute as positively as possible to the action by the international community to reinforce the peace efforts in the Middle East, and to wish you, again on behalf of my Government, a pleasant stay in Brussels.

HENNADIY U. UDOVENKO

President of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers of this Conference for inviting me to attend this important gathering. I am honoured to participate in the Conference in my capacity as President of the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly.

As you are well aware, the General Assembly has been concerned with efforts to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine for the past 50 odd years. In fact, since its very early days, the Organization has been trying to solve the problem through a variety of channels. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), partitioning Palestine into two States, one Arab, the other Jewish, with an economic union between them and a special international régime for the city of Jerusalem. Today, five decades later, the question of Palestine is still awaiting a viable political resolution and remains on the agenda of the General Assembly. The occupation of the Palestinian territories has lasted for 30 years.

The first signs of hope for the Palestinian people were heralded by the Middle East Peace Conference held at Madrid in 1991. The international community was hopeful that that landmark Conference could set in motion a qualitatively new stage in the search for peace in the region. Indeed, piloted by the co-sponsors of the peace process, with a critical role played by the Government of Norway, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization at long last came to face each other at the negotiating table. We have all observed and welcomed the milestone bilateral agreements initialled by the two sides in the past seven years. I should like to stress here how far-reaching and dramatic were some of those documents, most notably, the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1995.

As we meet today, we have to note with a considerable measure of concern that, in the course of 1997, the Israeli-Palestinian track of negotiations has largely been stalemated.

The year started off with promising advances on the issue of Hebron, just to be followed by very disappointing setbacks that lingered for some 10 months. Recently, the negotiating process has restarted with a series of contacts in Washington, D.C.

Throughout 1997, the international community became increasingly alarmed at the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground, particularly on the question of Israeli settlement activities, the prolonged closures with damaging economic effect and the exacerbation of violence and tension. It unanimously condemned the bombing attacks which resulted in the loss of many innocent lives, and called upon the parties not to let the peace process be derailed by the enemies of peace. It also called upon them to implement fully the agreements already reached and to refrain from unilateral measures that jeopardize the peace process.

Both the General Assembly and the Security Council addressed the issue of Israeli settlements on a number of occasions. The Security Council has twice met on the establishment of a new Israeli settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem. It held extensive discussions on the issue, but was unable to take action on it owing to the lack of unanimity among its permanent members. The fifty-first session of the General Assembly was resumed on this question. At the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, the issue of settlements and the rights of the Palestinian people was brought into sharp focus again. Its convening became yet another demonstration of the level of concern at the present state of affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory in general, and Jerusalem in particular, as a result of the Israeli Government's settlement policies.

The vast majority of the international community, as represented in the General Assembly, repeatedly affirmed that the principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), should be respected. These resolutions, so often referred to, have underscored the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and are at the basis of the agreements reached by the parties, which should be fully implemented.

Those principles were reaffirmed by the General Assembly during the discussion of the question of Palestine in December 1997. In its resolution 52/52 of 9 December 1997, the General Assembly, while expressing its full support for the ongoing peace process and the necessity for commitment to the aforementioned principles, called upon the concerned parties, the co-sponsors and the entire international community to exert all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track. The General Assembly also stressed the need for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination, and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. It emphasized the importance for the United Nations to play a more active and expanded role in the current peace process and in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. As you know, this resolution, adopted by an overwhelming majority, received an even greater support than in previous years.

In conclusion, I would also like to recall the General Assembly's position that the United Nations should continue to have a special responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy. Peace in the Middle East must prevail. It will not be possible, however, unless the rights of the Palestinian people are attained. As the current peace process has recognized, those rights are key to any serious endeavours to achieve a sustainable solution of the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general. In this connection, I wish to commend the resolve of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in its persistent efforts to achieve that goal through the implementation of the important mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

KOFI ANNAN
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS
(Statement delivered by Sir Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs)

It is an honour for me to convey a message to this Conference on the question of Palestine being held under the joint auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States.

I wish to express gratitude both for the hospitality offered by the Government of Belgium and for the assistance provided to the United Nations Secretariat in organizing this meeting.

Belgium's strong support for the objectives and work of the United Nations is well-known. The country's location at the heart of Europe and its role as a seat of European institutions add an important dimension to this event. The United Nations is also grateful for the personal interest in this meeting demonstrated by His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Belgium.

I would also like to congratulate the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their cooperation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights, and for their generosity in shouldering part of the costs. Working together in this manner is yet another example of the ongoing productive cooperation between our respective organizations, as called for in General Assembly resolutions.

Like each of my predecessors, I attach high priority to the search for a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East and its core question, the question of Palestine. The current, prolonged stalemate between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization is a source of great concern. Indeed, there is fear that without renewed momentum in the peace process, and without tangible signs of progress, the situation may deteriorate further, with unforeseeable consequences. Regrettably, however, the positions of the parties remain far apart.

At such a time it is important to remember the many historic achievements of recent years: mutual recognition by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the signing of the Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the beginning of a process of reconciliation and economic cooperation among the countries of the region.

These developments were welcomed worldwide and gave rise to hope that an irreversible turning point had been reached. The parties must not turn back now; they must find it in themselves to persevere. I call upon all sides to take the difficult decisions needed to build on their impressive achievements and move towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on the principles enshrined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and reflected in the Oslo Accords.

It is now 50 years since the General Assembly decided to partition Palestine. The history of the conflict since then, and the advances made since the Madrid Conference of 1991, have shown that the road to peace requires an end to exclusive claims, respect for the legitimate rights and needs of all the parties, mutual accommodation and the establishment of cooperative relationships between the peoples of the region.

The road to peace requires the parties to respect and implement fully the agreements they have signed, and to refrain from unilateral acts that undermine trust and exacerbate tensions. The road to peace also makes it essential to put an end to terrorism and violence among Palestinians and Israelis—acts by extremists aimed not only at innocent civilians but also at the peace process itself.

The creation of economic and social conditions conducive to peace is also of fundamental importance. The United Nations has long played a crucial role in this regard, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The United Nations presence also includes the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and the Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. Donor countries, for their part, and in particular those of the European Union, have provided critical assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

These efforts must continue unhindered, particularly in the light of worsening economic conditions in the occupied territories and the great challenges that remain.

As you know, I had planned to visit the Middle East in February 1998, in order to listen to the concerns of the leaders and peoples of the region. Unfortunately, owing to circumstances beyond my control, the trip was postponed. But I will reschedule at the earliest possible opportunity.

Today, as you mobilize international support for the Palestinian people, I would like to reaffirm that the United Nations, and I personally as its Secretary-General, will continue to do our utmost to help the parties find a peaceful resolution to the complex issues they face. Too many decades have passed without peace. We must do all we can to realize that long-held aspiration.

IBRA DEGUENE KA
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, it is a special pleasure for me to discharge the duty of expressing thanks, on behalf of all the figures present here and on my own behalf, to Erik Derycke, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

I would request you, Mr. Minister, to convey to His Majesty King Albert II, Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene and the Belgian Government as a whole our appreciation for having agreed to receive us here, in the heart of Europe, a growing Europe to which we remain deeply attached.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to all the special envoys and representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

Your presence in large numbers offers proof of the universal nature of the Palestinian cause, and this presence also marks your commitment to helping to solve this Israeli-Arab crisis which has been a subject of concern for the United Nations for some 50 years.

In organizing this international conference in Brussels in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People have only one aim in view: to make an effective contribution to relaunching the peace process and to strengthen the mobilization of European and international public opinion so as to ensure that the rights of the Palestinian people are respected and realized in practice.

As you know, this conflict has provoked five wars in the Middle East since 1948, and still continues to constitute a grave threat to peace and stability in that region.

Many resolutions have been adopted by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, and most of them have remained a dead letter.

The signature of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993 marked a significant historic stage in the long march towards peace in the Middle East. That Declaration led to the transfer of some powers to the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and put a stop to the accelerating cycles of violence. It generated a great deal of hope on the part of the international community that a peaceful political solution could be found to that distressing conflict.

But it must be acknowledged that in the past year, the hope that arose out of those agreements has steadily waned, and today the peace process is deadlocked. There has even been a backsliding, if not a calling into question of the commitments freely entered into by the occupying Power.

To this may be added the continuation of the illegal policy of forced settlement of Palestinian land, the violation of the international status of Jerusalem, repeated violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, as well as punitive expeditions and deliberate acts of provocation by armed settlers against innocent civilian groups.

In economic and social terms, the frequent closure of the borders of the Palestinian territories costs the young Palestinian economy almost $10 million per day.

The Palestinian people expected a qualitative improvement in its rights following the adoption of the Declaration of Principles, but it has to be acknowledged that today the Palestinians have lost all their illusions, as the status of their rights as a people continues to worsen day by day, despite the repeated appeals of the international community.

The Palestinians have the right to development. They must be guaranteed free access to places of worship, their children must be able to enjoy a proper education and their lives and their goods must be protected, together with their freedom to travel back and forth. These are fundamental human rights for which reminders should not be necessary in this fiftieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In short, adequate steps must be taken to ensure that the Palestinians themselves exercise their sovereignty over their own land, as a state.

The legal instruments exist. They are the very decisions adopted by the United Nations over a period of many decades as instruments of a peaceful and lasting settlement of the Middle East crisis. I am referring to General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 1947 and 194 (III) of 1948, and Security Council resolutions 237 (1967), 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 497 (1981).

In conclusion, allow me to make a further solemn call from this platform to the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union, all countries and all those of goodwill to ensure that all of us together, with the United Nations, increase our efforts to contribute to the speedy resumption of the peace negotiations.

We must mobilize, and do so rapidly, for nothing is more destructive for a society than for its people to feel that they are being treated differently from others.

Let us ensure that the highly symbolic changes of political and historical significance which the peace process generated in 1993 continue to foster a momentum for peace and development in the Middle East in which all the fundamental rights of peoples, all peoples, will be respected.

Let us ensure a new dawn of peace and development for the Middle East, that region which is history's and the world's crossroads, in order that, in concord and fraternity, the Israeli and Arab peoples, whom God created to live together, may join forces to make a leap into the twenty-first century, nurturing every hope and creating every prerequisite for their peoples to co-habit and develop together.

AZZEDINE LARAKI

Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference

I would like to salute, with great pleasure, the presence among us today of President Yasser Arafat.

Allow me also to express my thanks and appreciation to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to its Chairman, Ibra Deguène Ka, for their effective work in publicizing the Palestine question and explaining its dimensions. In so doing, the Committee has contributed to enhancing international support for the just struggle waged by the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable and imprescriptible national rights.

I am also pleased to express my thanks and appreciation to the Government of Belgium for the arrangements and facilities it has contributed and which have made it possible to convene this Conference.

Our Conference is taking place several years after the launching of the Middle East peace process, and the signing of the interim self-rule agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. Regrettably, however, we are witnessing a halt in the peace negotiations and an increased tension, which threatens to undermine the peace process and to bring back the climate of conflict to the region. The direct cause of this development is the intransigence of the Israeli Government and its refusal to abide by the agreements signed in the framework of the peace process and to recognize the principles underpinning this process.

Concomitant with these Israeli stands is a serious escalation of the inhuman and illegal practices and measures exercised by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people. Among these practices are arrests that last for long periods without any charges made or trials held, and cruel torture in the prisons. Moreover, in flagrant defiance of the will of the international community and the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Israeli Government persists in its policy of colonization in the Palestinian territories by establishing new settlements and expanding existing ones. These practices and measures constitute a brazen violation of human rights and of all international conventions and agreements, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilians Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949.

The Israeli occupation authorities are making massive efforts to change the civilizational and cultural landmarks as well as the demographic set up of Al-Quds al-Sharif. It is sealing off the city and isolating it from other Palestinian towns and villages; preventing Palestinian citizens from entering the city for worship; and trying to empty the city of its Arab Palestinian inhabitants by withdrawing their identity papers and confiscating their property. The aim of these practices, which are contrary to the principles of international law and to the resolutions of international legitimacy, is to present the world with a fait accompli, thereby prejudging the outcome of the negotiations on the final status of the city in contravention of the agreements concluded in the framework of the peace process.

The international community, which has constantly welcomed the peace process in the Middle East and the courage of the concerned parties in forging ahead to ensure the achievement of the set objectives, is today called upon to make every effort to bring about peace and security. The Palestinian people expect the international community to play the role required of it. Occupation has lasted too long and rights are still usurped and freedoms denied. Continuation of this situation constitutes a threat to security and stability in the region. The Palestinian people aspire to just and comprehensive peace as the best guarantee of security, stability and development in the region.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference holds that there are indefectible links between right and peace and that the denial of rights inevitably leads to violence and tension, hence our commitment to peace as a strategic option based on right, justice and the exercise of sovereignty by the Palestinian people over their own territory. This is a sine qua non that requires the end of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the exercise of the inalienable and imprescriptible national rights of the Palestinian people. We also urge the resumption of peace negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, on the basis of the same principles on which they were launched, and from the point where they had been interrupted. We further urge all parties to adhere to, and implement, the agreements and treaties arrived at within the framework of the peace process.

Peace is a collective and imperative effort which can neither be imposed nor evaded. It can only be realized with the commitment of all parties to the foundations upon which it is based. We are confident that our joint efforts will contribute to safeguarding the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their national and legitimate rights; that peace and stability will be realized in the Middle East and that a climate of tolerance and coexistence will prevail among its peoples. We are very hopeful to achieve these goals and we shall make every effort in this direction.

SAID KAMAL
Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States
(on behalf of Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States)

I am happy to speak to you on behalf of Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who sends his greetings to you all, together with his appreciation of your cooperation and of your response to the convening of this important Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. He would have been with us had it not been for the situation in the region, which made it necessary for him to remain in Cairo. Your presence here today represents a natural extension of the positions you have taken in support of such rights, and it is a confirmation of your commitment and that of the countries and organizations you represent to the values of justice and peace inculcated by all divinely revealed religions and enshrined in the constitutions of civilized States and the founding charters of international organizations. I should like, on behalf of the League of Arab States, to convey to the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium our gratitude for hosting this Conference and for all the facilities it has made available.

As you know, this Conference, which is being held through the joint efforts of the United Nations, as represented by its Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and of the League of Arab States, is an expression of the faith of these organizations in the values of peace and justice and of their commitment, by virtue of their founding charters and their very nature, to the stability, peace and progress of their member States and of all mankind. It is also an expression of their deep involvement in the cause of the Palestinian people, an issue that has existed for some half century without finding a lasting solution despite a huge number of meetings and resolutions and, furthermore, despite the thousands of Palestinian dead and wounded and the millions of displaced and oppressed that have been its victims.

There is no need for me to go back to the root causes of the issue or to the reasons for which the people of Palestine was deprived of the legitimate rights in whose support we are gathered here today. There is no need for me to launch into a review of the various stages of the odious, historic oppression that descended upon it owing to global circumstances in which the great Powers competed to advance their interests without regard for the rights and interests of this people. Its homeland was thus usurped in its entirety, its basic rights were violated, and it was subjected to recurrent slaughter and expulsion. For half a century it has been suffering bitterly, while the fraternal Arab peoples suffer with it, under the tyrannous policies and practices of the Israeli occupation.

Despite all the injustice done to successive generations of the Palestinian people, it did not lose hope of victory and justice. It persevered, with the support of the Arab States, resolutely and faithfully, in the struggle for freedom, national independence and the establishment of an independent State with its capital at Jerusalem. The successive resolutions of the United Nations, the most recent being General Assembly resolution ES.10/3 "Uniting for peace", have provided support to this people and have strengthened its confidence in its sense of belonging within the international community.

This has made it more committed to its rights and more covetous of freedom and peace, inasmuch as it proclaimed its peace initiative when President Yasser Arafat spoke from the podium of the United Nations in 1974. He then renewed the initiative at the special meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations in Geneva in 1988 and then participated in the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 on the basis of a resolution of the Council of the League of Arab States. Then came the agreements of 1993 and the subsequent supplementary agreements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel.

The League of Arab States has supported the Palestinian people in its quest for peace, just as it has supported it in its struggle for independence. The League of Arab States was an early supporter of the peace process, even prior to the convening of the Madrid Conference. At its September 1991 session, the Council of the League adopted a resolution welcoming the efforts being made for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and supporting the Arab States directly involved in the negotiations.

Following the signing in Washington, D.C., in September 1993 of the agreement concluded in Oslo, the Council of the League, at its session held in that same month, stated that it regarded the agreement as an important first step towards the application of the principle of land for peace and one that must be supplemented by further rapid steps on all negotiating tracks. The League of Arab States maintained its support for the peace process in the light of the Arabs' belief that peace is a strategic choice. The hope was that genuine progress would be made in the process, and it might well have been but for the policies pursued by the present Israeli Government under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu.

All the indications are, however, that the current Israeli Government lacks enthusiasm for the peace process and that it opposes all of the principles on which it is based. Despite the positive stance taken by the Palestinians and the Arabs and the international efforts being made to maintain the process until such time as it produces a comprehensive and just peace, the policies pursued by the Netanyahu Government since it came to power have remained the same and have indeed become more intransigent from one day to the next. They are exemplified by the continued pursuit of the settlement policy, the expropriation of land, the imposition of economic blockades and collective punishments on the Palestinian people, procrastination in the negotiations, and general disregard for the agreements signed by the previous Israeli Government with the Palestine Liberation Organization and even an endeavour to undermine them, as is happening on the Palestinian track, or to suspend them, as is happening on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. At the same time, the Israeli Government has also escalated its repeated attacks on southern Lebanon and the Western Bekaa and is persisting in the pursuit of its settlement policy in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

Everyone now knows that the present Government in Israel is pursuing a policy that is opposed to the peace process and its various mechanisms. It is thereby challenging Arab and Palestinian rights acknowledged by the United Nations and also challenging all the principles of international legitimacy and the international covenants establishing the right of peoples, including the Palestinian people, to exercise self-determination and to enjoy sovereignty over their resources.

Faced with a situation in which Israel appears to be trying to impose a state of no war and no peace, at its September 1997 session the Council of the League of Arab States considered the status of the peace process in the Middle East and dwelt at length on the dangers of current Israeli policy and its devastating impact on the peace process. It also considered all the international efforts being made to salvage the peace process, bring it back on track and advance it towards the realization of the principles on which it was based, as represented by the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Much has been expected of the intensive talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization to which the United States has been a party at the highest levels. We at the League of Arab States, like all who cherish peace, have been prompted by the hope that the international efforts led by the United States as a major sponsor of the peace process would succeed in inducing Israel to be bound by the principles of the peace process and by the agreements reached in that framework. There has not, however, been any change in Israel's position thus far, and we have seen no compliance with its obligations on the ground. This means, most regrettably, that we are faced with an impasse and that the international efforts and those of the United States require an additional impetus and need to be imbued with a new spirit in keeping with the pressing need to safeguard the peace process in the Middle East and a renewal of the spirit of optimism that prevailed at the outset and that would protect us all from the dangers of despair and hatred and bar the way to acts of extremism and violence and perhaps even war and destruction.

In March 1998 the Council of the League of Arab States will hold its one hundred and ninth regular session. As at previous sessions, it will consider one of the most important questions on its agenda, namely the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process. It will review the situation in its entirety in the light of the presentations made by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Arab States and of political developments in the region affecting the question of Palestine. The Ministers will certainly take as their point of departure the final communiqué of the Arab Summit Conference held at Cairo in June 1996, which affirmed the Arab commitment to peace as a strategic choice, while also linking any genuine progress with Israel's discharge of its obligations and with its acknowledgement of the Arab and Palestinian rights set forth in the instruments and resolutions of the United Nations. The communiqué was also based on the numerous resolutions of the Council itself relating to the terms of the Arab position.

There can also be no doubt that a major question will be raised concerning the role of the international community in and international responsibility for the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and compliance with the agreements concluded by the parties to the conflict in the Middle East that were fostered and witnessed by the co-sponsors of the peace process. It will be clear to every Arab citizen that Israel is unjust in its dealings with the Palestinian people in connection with its basic rights. This is paralleled by the injustice of certain parties in the international community in their approach to the resolutions in question when they insist, in a grievous and regrettable manner, on using double standards when addressing different issues and conflicts. Reference must be made here to the positive positions taken by the European Union in connection with the peace process and to its support for reconstruction and development in the Palestinian territory.

This sense of injustice presents the supporters of peace with a cruel dilemma and fills the situation of deadlock that Israel is trying to impose on the region with hazards and surprises that will return the region to the instability of previous years in order to promote the implementation of the substance of Israel's destructive policy of fragmenting the region into petty States. This is the most dangerous threat to the peace process and to regional security.

Responsibility for the situation we are trying to depict in all candour and clarity, and from which we and all those committed to peace are trying to extricate ourselves, falls primarily on the Government of Israel because of its intransigence and its denial of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. It is also up to Israeli society and its activist forces to make up their minds in favour of peace and to participate in making a genuine peace and in confronting the policies that would destroy it.

The international community and its concerned institutions and States cannot be absolved of responsibility for the return of tension to the Middle East. The agreements and resolutions they have at hand must be implemented; the interests they have in the region are worth protecting; and they have excellent relations with the States of the region, such as those between the United States and Israel. All of these are elements that are adequate and, if well used, able to exert influence to prevent Israel from sabotaging the peace process and threatening an important region such as the Middle East in connection with a sensitive issue such as that of Palestine.

The League of Arab States, fully confident of your desire to serve peace, security and international stability, affirms its concern for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the norms of international legitimacy and conducive to the restoration of rights to those to whom they are due, and primarily the right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and establish an independent State with its capital at Jerusalem. The League looks forward, with complete trust and optimism, to your conference and to the reports it will transmit to your countries, peoples and organizations.

CARLOS LEMOS SIMMONDS

Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia

(on behalf of Ernesto Samper Pizano, President of Colombia and Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries)

I would like to begin by thanking the sponsors of this Conference, the Member States and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, as well as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their initiative in convening this important meeting. This Conference provides an opportunity for the non-aligned countries to meet at a significant event in order to restate their vision and concern for the situation of the Palestinian people.

I also wish to acknowledge the Belgian Government's support for this event which fosters discussion on the question of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in a continent that is called to play an increasingly decisive part in the future of the Middle East.

I should also thank the President of the General Assembly for joining us on this occasion. The role of this United Nations body in the Middle East peace process has been crucial.

I finally must thank the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, for honouring us with his presence. Once again we wish to express the solidarity of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in the just struggle of his people.

Given the critical and uncertain state in which the Middle East peace process finds itself at present and in spite of the undeniable progress made by the Palestinians in recent years, the outcome of their search for independence and self-determination gives us cause for grave concern.

It can no longer be denied that the peaceful climate that had briefly existed during the process of reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis has deteriorated to such an extent that any real possibility of reaching a peaceful settlement is now in question.

At this precarious juncture in the history of the Palestinian people, I would like to explain how the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries regards this issue which has been at the forefront of their concern and to which so much effort has been devoted.

The international community must insist on respect for international law, on respect for the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council that are in force, and on respect for international humanitarian law in occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

As the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries has repeatedly stressed, the Israeli Government's decision to continue its policy of settlements in occupied Arab territories, and specifically in Jerusalem, diverges from the spirit of the Oslo Accords, so eroding the fragile climate of trust established between the parties. Such policies also seek to influence the outcome of negotiations on permanent status and contravene international law.

Israel must appreciate that the only way it can contribute to the climate of trust required by any process of understanding is by duly complying with the accords it has entered into and with United Nations resolutions.

The Security Council must adopt a firm stance to secure respect for its own resolutions and for international law. It is therefore incomprehensible how, at this critical point when the peace process and international security are at risk, the Security Council fails to heed calls to joint action by the international community and by the overwhelming majority of its own members. The world order will be eroded if countries decide to enforce selectively some laws and United Nations resolutions while disregarding or delaying compliance with others.

At a time when the importance of prevention in maintaining international peace is highlighted, it does not make sense to ignore deteriorating conditions in a region which, after so many years, was finding a way towards peace.

One of the gravest areas of concern for the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at present is that of the economic and social circumstances of the Palestinian population. Behind the political aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict there is a human question which must be addressed to guarantee the Palestinians the right to develop as a people.

As Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Colombian Government last year sent the Swiss Government a letter stating that the Movement fully supported the request for a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War to be convened in order to consider measures which would ensure compliance with international humanitarian law in the occupied territories.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries agrees with the principle that direct talks are the best way for independence and self-determination to be obtained for the Palestinian people and for peace to be secured for all inhabitants of the region. Consequently, no individual position of any party must be allowed to prevail over the region's common interest to uphold the climate of trust required for further successful negotiations. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries regards its own efforts to this end as an attempt to safeguard the significant progress that has already taken place towards peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

The best response to acts of terrorism that seek to undermine hopes for peace is for all parties to insist on absolute compliance in good faith with the peace accords to which they are signatories. Before negotiations can move on, it must be realized that the fruit of peace can only be fully appreciated after a satisfactory conclusion to the negotiation process. In fact, any reprisals against innocent civilians and authorities for terrorist acts committed by radical sectors provide ammunition precisely to those who are seeking to destroy this peace process.

The Movement's accurate perception of the Middle East situation is demonstrated by the fact that the declaration adopted by the Movement's eleventh conference of Heads of State or Government at Cartagena regarding the Palestinian question is still valid and up to date.

The Heads of State or Government gathered in Cartagena expressed their total support for the Palestinians' legitimate struggle for respect for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence to be guaranteed. Their demand for Israel to withdraw from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem, was again stressed.

The Movement also drew attention to the fact that the United Nations must continue to act in keeping with its responsibility in this matter until the Palestinians were in a position to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, until an independent, sovereign State was established in their national territory and the refugee problem was addressed in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In view of the above, the Heads of State or Government of countries members of the Movement duly voiced their regret for Israel's decision to seize Palestinian properties and land in Jerusalem and for Israeli attempts to alter the religious and historical character of the Holy City. The Movement ratified all Security Council resolutions in this regard, expressed their support for those of the General Assembly regarding Jerusalem and considered all Israeli action in contravention of such resolutions null and void. An appeal was also made for a full, meticulous application of all accords, particularly of the stipulations contained in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980). The importance of an effective enforcement of the General Assembly mechanism relating to the Palestinian question was also underlined.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries is therefore constantly concerned about the situation of all occupied Arab territories and is committed to seeking peace in the Middle East. I wish to acknowledge the solidarity demonstrated by members of the Movement with the Palestinian cause during these difficult times, notably at the special emergency sessions held by the General Assembly in 1997. The developing world has stated that the United Nations must actively persevere in its efforts to ensure that the rights of the Palestinian people are respected and that peace in the Middle East is secured.

We are aware that what happens to the peace process in the next few months will have long-lasting effects on international peace. We, the non-aligned countries, will therefore remain watchful and willing to cooperate with all attempts to reach this objective, and so fulfil the responsibility of all nations regarding the future of the Palestinian people.

YASSER ARAFAT

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority

In the name of the Palestinian people and its leadership, as well as on my own behalf, it gives me pleasure to express our deep appreciation to the Government and people of the friendly Kingdom of Belgium for hosting this international conference in support of the Palestinian people to enable them to exercise their inalienable national rights in their homeland. We highly value Belgium's continuous and constructive efforts, along with its partners, the States members of the friendly European Union, who aim to support the peace process in the Middle East and endeavour to salvage it from the deadlock it has reached and push it forward and towards the reconstruction of the institutions of the Palestinian people, their national economy and the infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli occupation.

We are also pleased to express our utmost gratitude and deep appreciation to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the significant role they have played in support and defence of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. Additionally, we would like to reaffirm our wish that Palestine will acquire full participation in the work of the United Nations.

It is also my pleasure to extend our genuine thanks and appreciation to brother Azzedine Laraki, the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and to the representative of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, for their sincere efforts in organizing this important Conference and for their participation and endeavors towards its success.

I would like also to express our special thanks to Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nation, and to his representative, Sir Kieran Prendergast, and to Hennadiy U. Udovenko, President of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, for their participation in the Conference.

I am very pleased as well to convey our gratitude to the members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and to its Chairman, Ernesto Samper Pizano, President of Colombia, and to his representative Carlos Lemos Simmonds, who joins us in this Conference in expressing the support and solidarity of the Movement with the Palestinian people and their just struggle to restore and exercise their rights.

I also wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and their representatives and to the Ambassadors and to the representatives of non-governmental organizations for their efforts in support of the question of the Palestinian people and their just and legitimate national rights.

The convening of this Conference under the critical and sensitive circumstances that have besieged the peace process on all tracks, especially the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian track, takes on great significance owing to the stagnation facing this process and to the failure of all regional and international efforts to revive it. As such, the Palestinian people, whose plight has been linked from the onset with the United Nations, have particularly high expectations from that organization and the whole international community, which maintain the responsibility to grant them justice and enable them to restore and exercise their inalienable rights, primarily their right to return, to self-determination and to establish their independent State, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

The United Nations bears a historical responsibility towards the Palestinian people and their cause since it was the United Nations that adopted General Assembly resolution 181 (II), partitioning mandated Palestine in order to establish two States, one for Arabs and one for Jews, and it is the United Nations that has affirmed through many resolutions by several bodies the justness and legitimacy of the rights of the Palestinian people and has also specified the basis and principles for establishing peace in the Middle East. Hence, the United Nations bears a permanent responsibility towards the Palestinian people and their just cause until the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace, which will guarantee security and stability for all the peoples and States in the Middle East region and, will guarantee an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab Lands and Holy Places.

The year 1998 marks 50 years since the tragedy (nakba) in 1948 that befell the Palestinian people and successive generations, which led to their uprooting and dispersion from their homeland, deprivation of all their human rights, the seizure of their properties and resources and subjection throughout the last five decades to Diaspora and to all kinds and types of oppression, injustice and continuous suffering. At the same time, it also marks 50 years of continued struggle by the Palestinian people towards the restoration of their national identity, preservation of their existence and the exercise of their legitimate rights, particularly their right to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent state with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. This will enable them to contribute equitably, side by side, with all peoples of the region and liberation movements in the world to build and consolidate a permanent peace and to achieve security, stability and prosperity for all.

As we recall these bitter and painful historical events and circumstances from which the Palestinian people have suffered for so long and continue to suffer from, we urge the international community and the United Nations, and we urge our friends, and all those who cherish freedom, justice, peace and democracy in the world, to intensify their good efforts effectively and to do their utmost to support the Palestinian people in their just struggle, in order to transform these noble goals into reality, protect the peace of the brave and exercise their independence and national sovereignty like the rest of the peoples of the world.

The year also coincides with the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Principles with the Government of Israel, which represented the beginning of a new era in the Middle East and a historical turn in the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the aim of achieving the desired peace, the peace of the braves, which we have chosen with faith and conviction and which we began to build with our late partner, Yitzhak Rabin, and which we continued forward after him with Shimon Peres, followed by the signing of the Hebron Protocol with the current Israeli Government.

The essence of the Declaration of Principles and the agreements that followed are the mutual recognition of the legitimate and political rights of two sides and the establishment of a peace process which leads to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and which will guarantee the restoration and exercise of the national inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the attainment of a historic reconciliation between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples based on equality and mutual respect, as was provided for in the transitional agreement. This also included the arrangements for the transitional period, lasting for five years and aiming to build trust, to establish the Palestinian jurisdiction, to transfer authority, to withdraw the Israeli army from Palestinian lands and outside occupied Palestinian cities and villages and to start the negotiations regarding the issues on final status, particularly Jerusalem, settlements, borders, refugees, water and other sensitive and complex issues. The future and fate of the peace process in the Middle East depends on a just and acceptable resolution of these issues. All of these are aimed at building a new reality under which the Palestinian people will enjoy the termination of Israeli occupation and thus enjoy independence, sovereignty and economic prosperity in a way that will guarantee security and stability to all peoples and States of the Middle East region.

We continue to work for the establishment of peace, the peace of the brave, with determination and perseverance. We have realized important achievements in this regard, despite the great difficulties that we have faced and continue to face with attempts to foil peaceful efforts and kill the peace process in its nascence. Nevertheless, through guidance and determination we were able to pursue the peace process until a new reality emerged from the Israeli side. This reality has been characterized by the absence of political will on the part of the Government of Mr. Netanyahu, including evading the continuation of the peace process, denial of and retraction from the agreements reached and from the principle of land for peace, and its refusal to implement these agreements and the contractual obligations. This Government is clearly attempting to create and formulate a new basis for the peace process, which aims to entrench the Israeli conditions and to discard everything that was agreed upon, and impose a de facto situation and Israeli conditions upon us. Through unilateral measures it aims to dictate its will on the Palestinian people and their leadership and to force them to surrender large parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Al-Quds al-Sharif and its surroundings. None of these attempts will succeed. Such attempts are totally rejected and will not be acceptable to the Palestinian people and their leadership.

As we affirm our commitment to peace as a strategic choice and exert every possible effort to rescue the peace process from its deadlock, we call upon the Government of Israel to recognize the necessity of implementing the agreements reached and for the parties to comply with the contractual obligations of these agreements. We will continue to comply with our obligations despite the great difficulties resulted from Israeli policies and positions, which contradict the spirit and essence of peace. In return the Israeli side must, in particular, complete the three redeployment stages that have been agreed upon and refrain from any unilateral measures, creating new facts on the ground and prejudging the final status negotiations and unilaterally fixing the map of the final settlement.

The current Israeli Government's continuous pursuit of its de facto policy is characterized by the continued demolition of houses, confiscation of Palestinian lands, building and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, especially in Al-Quds al-Sharif. With regard to Al-Quds al-Sharif, the Israeli policy is also characterized by the city's judaization, isolation and siege, along with the city of Bethlehem, with settlements and army forces, and attempts to obliterate its historical, religious, and civilized character and its Islamic, Christian and Arab identity and to distort its demographic composition through the confiscation of identity cards of the Palestinian citizens and their expulsion from it. The Israeli Government recklessly playing with its legal status and creating a substitute city by building the new settlement of Jabal Abu Ghneim to rival the city of Bethlehem, which is preparing to celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ. All of these feverish actions and attempts contradict the spirit of peace and agreements reached and threaten to destroy the whole peace process in the region. Thus, saving the peace process requires compliance by the Israeli Government with its obligations and implementation of its due requirements according to the provisions of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron Protocol, particularly those relating to the opening of the Gaza airport, the resumption of work on the seaport, the establishment of safe passage, the opening of checkpoints, the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons, the facilitation of work in the industrialized zones and ceasing other deliberate violations.

The refusal of the current Israeli Government to implement its due obligations, in addition to other numerous violations of the agreements and its continuous media campaign against the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people, have intensified the feelings of anger and frustration within the Palestinian masses, have engendered a lack of trust and have killed all of the hopes that were elevated with the start of the peace process. This has led to the creation of a critical reality that must be dealt with immediately before it is too late. In the light of this, we urge the international community and the United Nations and its bodies not to allow the continuing intransigence of the Israeli Government and its evasiveness and to bring an end to its continuous recklessness and its outright rejection of all resolutions of international legitimacy, of human rights, of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the agreements reached. The Israeli majority, which wants peace, should take action and make initiatives to exert pressure on the current Israeli Government to move forward with the peace process towards its intended goals for the future of our children end their children.

In this regard, we appreciate the efforts of the United States of America, including the personal efforts of President Clinton and Secretary Madeline Albright, and we hope to see continuation and intensification of these efforts to guarantee Israeli compliance with and implementation of the agreements, which were signed in Washington, D.C., with the presence and the signatures of the co-sponsors of the peace process and which were witnessed and signed by the European Union, Norway, the Arab Republic of Egypt and Jordan and with the presence of Japan. We also highly value the efforts of the Russian Federation and the European Union, China, Japan and our Islamic brothers and non-aligned countries and members of the international community, who are concerned about these agreements and about international peace and security.

We call upon the international community to uphold its responsibilities and to undertake its role to exert pressure on the Israeli Government to force it to comply with its obligations in accordance with the peace agreements, and to cease its violation of these agreements. We firmly believe that many concerned and effective international parties actually possess the necessary means, according to international law and to legal, political and moral obligations towards peace, which accord them the ability to undertake this constrictive role towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

We look with great hope and confidence to your serious follow up of the outcome of the tenth emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly, particularly to the convening of the expert meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, in preparation for the conference on measures to enforce the provisions of this Convention. We also hope that other United Nations bodies, particularly the Security Council, will undertake their duties in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Speaking of the Security Council and its resolutions, and of international law, reminds us in particular of the current crisis in the Middle East, which may cause more severe suffering to another Arab people, the brotherly Iraqi people, to the serious destruction that this crisis might bring to the region as a whole.

We strongly support and call for a peaceful settlement solution to this current crisis regarding Iraq, based on the implementation of Security Council resolutions and upholding international law, including the preservation of the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. We also support all the good efforts exerted to reach a desired solution by political and peaceful means and through constructive dialogue, especially the constructive effort, which Kofi Annan has done, leading to the fruitful signing of the last agreement between the United Nation and the Iraqi Government. This agreement predominated what we called upon for a peaceful option than any other options.

Within two years, our world will witness a unique and important event for all humanity, which is the celebration of the second millennium of Jesus Christ. God has blessed our country, Palestine, and specifically Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, to be the site of this milestone event in the history of humanity. As we prepare to celebrate the reception of the first rays of daylight of the year 2000, we hope that this great religious and historical occasion will be a new beginning full of love and peace for our world and for mankind and a new chapter for the Palestinian people, in which they will be enabled to establish their independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

We undertake the necessary work, we exert the necessary and continuous efforts, we fulfil our responsibility according to our limited capacities and we contribute through this our share to the preparations to commemorate this occasion. Nevertheless, none of this is enough. We therefore call upon the United Nations and the international community and countries of the world to exert and intensify efforts and to participate with us to make these great religious and historical celebrations of the birth of Jesus Christ successful.

Finally, I extend to you, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, our utmost gratitude and deep appreciation for your participation with us in this important Conference, through which you have expressed your solidarity and generous support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We urge you to reaffirm your good efforts and do all you can to enable them to realize these rights so they can live in their homeland with freedom and dignity, like the rest of the peoples on earth, and to protect the peace of brave in the Holy Land for our future generations and for the sake of our children and their children.

III. RESUMED HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING

SADOK FAYALA
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia

Permit me at the outset to say how happy I am to be taking part in this important Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to convey to you the greetings of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali wishing success to your work of promoting the cause of the fraternal Palestinian people in its quest for freedom and emancipation and of securing for all the peoples of the region the requirements for tranquillity, peace and security.

I am also happy to convey appreciation to the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, for their endeavours and initiatives in support of the rights of the Palestinian people and to express the hope that the Committee will continue its activities until such time as the Palestinian people succeeds in regaining all of its rights. I likewise convey our warm gratitude to the Belgian Government for all the facilities it has provided us for the success of the Conference.

Since the Palestinian tragedy first began, the Committee has been playing a fundamental and effective role in promoting legitimate Palestinian rights under international law and in supporting the Palestinian people in its struggle to regain the exercise of all its rights, like all other peoples of the Earth, and particularly its right to self-determination and an independent State in its own territory.

The holding of this Conference is one further indication that the United Nations is continuing to discharge its responsibilities in full, which is of particular importance given the critical situation in the Middle East region and the despair and frustration of the Palestinian people owing to the suspension of the peace process, the narrowing of horizons and the deterioration in living conditions that has resulted from the policy of the Israeli authorities of imposing closures and blockades on the Palestinian territory.

Support for the Palestinian people has always been a core concern for Tunisia. Our country has endeavoured, since the beginning of the fraternal Palestinian people's struggle for its legitimate rights, to lend a helping hand and to assist it at all levels and in all international forums. It has done so in its firm belief that this people has the right to achieve its national goals and to live in dignity in its own territory like the world's other peoples.

Having associated itself with the peace process since it began in Madrid, under the direct and ongoing sponsorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and having played a historic role at each of its stages, inasmuch as it represents a strategic choice and the sole guarantee of the security and interests of all the parties concerned, Tunisia expresses its great and profound concern at the deterioration and suspension of the process owing to the intransigence of the Israeli Government, its disavowal of the undertakings given in the context of the Oslo, Washington, D.C., and Cairo agreements, and its persistence in stepping up settlement activity in Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. The result of the unilateral measures it is taking is to undermine the principles and foundations on which the peace process was based and to reverse the gains achieved within its framework heralding the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the region, the creation of appropriate conditions for their cooperation and action for development in the interests of all.

Having heralded the first steps taken on the road to a political settlement that will guarantee the restoration to the Palestinian people of the attributes of national sovereignty, inasmuch as its leadership has returned to the homeland after many years of exile and dispersion, the legitimacy of that leadership has been confirmed in democratic elections under the auspices of the international community and the efforts of the fledgling Palestinian Authority have been dedicated to development and the establishment of State institutions, we regard the disruption of the peace process, the suspension of the agreements concluded and the failure to discharge the obligations set forth in the agreements as being in violation of the spirit and principles of international law and as representing contempt for the will of the international community. This may return the region to its cycle of violence and conflict and create an atmosphere of tension and instability in the Middle East, with unpredictable consequences.

Accordingly, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in his statement of 9 February 1998 to the diplomatic corps in Tunisia, said that:

"Salvaging the peace process is an international duty. It is essential that the efforts of all should be stepped up, especially the efforts of the co-sponsors and the States members of the European Union, in order to induce Israel to discharge its obligations by implementing the agreements concluded and honouring the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace".

In commending to this distinguished gathering the ongoing efforts of international parties to reactivate the peace process and induce Israel to honour its international obligations and implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), I should like to stress the need for further action and greater effort to overcome present obstacles and to establish the rights of the Palestinian people and enable it to fulfil its aspiration to exercise self-determination and build an independent State in its own territory with its capital at Jerusalem and so that Syria and Lebanon may recover all their occupied territories in accordance with international law. These are preconditions for the achievement of that just, comprehensive and lasting peace that is sought by all in the Middle East.

CHERIF YOUNOUSS DIAITE
Ambassador, Director of the Cabinet of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal
(on behalf of Abdou Diouf, President of Senegal)

Allow me first of all to convey to you the cordial and fraternal greetings and encouragement of Abdou Diouf, President of of Senegal.

President Diouf asked me to represent him personally here, at this important international conference of solidarity and support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Had it not been for previous engagements, President Abdou Diouf would be among us today to respond to the kind invitation jointly extended to him by Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Azzedine Laraki, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Within the United Nations, where our country has had the honour of chairing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since its establishment in 1975, and in the framework of the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Senegal has always expressed its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its leaders, foremost among whom is President Yasser Arafat, who is present here.

For many decades the Palestinian people has made numerous efforts to regain its rights, with the support of its friends, whose circle is growing day by day, and with the backing of the United Nations, whose primary and universal task is to build a world of peace, justice and law, based on respect for the dignity of peoples, nations and human beings, whom God created in order that they might live together in community and communion, in fraternity and solidarity.

As the year 1998 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is highly symbolic that the International Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is being held during an anniversary of particular significance for the history of humanity and the destiny of the Palestinian people. But this conference is also being held at a critical moment for the peace process in the Middle East. It is being held in a place that is a symbol in itself - Brussels, capital of an evolving Europe - a Europe that is being built through solidarity, dialogue and negotiation, a Europe with which we Africans, together with the peoples of the Caribbean and Pacific nations, have, for over 40 years, been engaged in a joint effort to build a unified transcontinental sphere, based on a strategic, fertile and dynamic Euraffrican partnership.

I should like, therefore, to take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to the authorities of the Kingdom of Belgium for agreeing to host this important meeting in this European land, and to thank Erik Derycke, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, for opening these important proceedings.

I also wish to greet our European partners by expressing to them our deepest appreciation for the many forms of aid which they have provided to the Palestinian people, of whom the European Union remains the principal benefactor.

The question of Palestine is indeed the thorniest and most complex issue which the United Nations inherited upon its establishment in 1945. As you know, this question, which has been considered for several decades by the General Assembly, is at the heart of the Middle East crisis and remains a primary international concern. A just and lasting settlement of this question is an essential condition for stability in this sensitive region of the world.

The United Nations, which has been charged with a primary and permanent responsibility in this area, has, through the General Assembly and the Security Council, adopted numerous resolutions, which have, for the most part, remained ineffective.

In spite of this, the international community has never lost hope. It has strengthened its support, for, as we all agree, a settlement of this crisis requires a perfect universal concert of voices—all the voices of all the countries in the world. It also, and especially, requires a strong synergy of efforts, initiatives and approaches on the part of all peace- and justice-loving persons of good will.

Accordingly, we have all nourished the hope that the significant progress made in the last few years would be consolidated.

With the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the signing of the Oslo and Washington, D.C., accords in September 1993, we thought that this land of ancient civilizations, the cradle of revealed religions, steeped in tolerance and humanism, would return to its former role as a land of convergence, love and peace.

We thought that the Palestinian refugees would return rapidly to their towns and villages with dignity and honour, and that the irrepressible longings of the Palestinian people for self-determination and the building of a Palestinian State would finally be realized.

We thought then, in good faith, that the question of East Jerusalem would be settled and that Israel, secure within its internationally recognized borders, would, in accordance with international law, proceed to withdraw its troops from the occupied Arab territories and to enter into a new era of partnership, peace, stability and shared development with the neighbours that history and geography had given it.

It must be acknowledged that in the light of the developments in 1997, threats loom over the legitimate hopes of the international community, owing to certain unilateral measures and the freeze in the implementation of the agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority.

The policy of colonization of the Palestinian Arab territories has continued, along with the confiscation of land in Jerusalem, frequent and prolonged closings of the Palestinian territories, provocations by armed settlers against Palestinian civilians, extortion and punitive measures against innocent populations.

Several months ago, the occupying Power launched a deliberate policy of Judaization of East Jerusalem, with the building of a new Jewish settlement on Arab soil at Abu Ghneim, a highly symbolic site. Other similar measures have been carried out in the past few weeks, despite the recent initiatives undertaken by the United States of America and certain European countries for the resumption of the peace negotiations.

This deliberate policy was strongly condemned at the two emergency special sessions and the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

In the light of the dangerous evolution of the situation in the region, marked by the stalemate in the peace process, the international mobilization for the rights of the Palestinian people deserves to be strengthened and expanded. The Palestinians have a right to live as a people and a nation within a sovereign State. They have a right to peace, security, personal safety and the safety of their property. It is clear to everyone that these fundamental, inalienable and indissoluble rights cannot be exercised anywhere but in the land of their ancestors - in their homeland, in Palestine, in a free Palestine with a legal and internationally recognized status.

My country, Senegal, remains deeply convinced that there can be no peace and security in this region so long as the rights of the Palestinian people continue to be ignored, the relevant United Nations resolutions continue to be flouted with impunity and the principles laid down in the Madrid, Oslo, Washington, D.C., and Taba accords, establishing the exchange of "land for peace", remain a dead letter.

It is in this spirit that our country supports the holding of a conference of the States parties to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, with the full participation of the Palestinian delegation.

The risks of an escalation are real if we do nothing to get the peace process back on track and establish confidence-building measures that could help to relaunch the negotiations, starting from the points of agreement already reached by the parties.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, the United Nations through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the General Assembly and the Security Council, the cosponsors of the peace process, non-governmental organizations and all persons of good will must exert all possible influence on the course of events in order to halt the dangerous trend towards a resumption of hostilities. The international community must do everything in its power to ensure that the voice of reason and good judgement prevails.

This is the message that President Abdou Diouf asked me to deliver to you on the occasion of this important International Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. It is a message of peace and hope, a powerful message of renewed solidarity with the Palestinian people and with President Yasser Arafat - a message of thanks and encouragement to all persons of good will who are working every day to advance the cause of peace, justice and the human rights of the Palestinian people.

L. N. SISULU
Deputy Minister of Home Affairs of South Africa,
(on behalf of Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa)

It is indeed an extraordinary honour for me to participate in this esteemed conference on behalf of my President Nelson Mandela.

The South African Government is concerned about the breakdown over the past more in the process of negotiation, a process which was perhaps the most notable result of the Oslo Accords and one of the great factors of hope for a future of peace between Israel and Palestine. South Africa remains unequivocally supportive of the peace plan mapped out at Oslo and sees a future of lasting peace and friendship between Israel and Palestine only if it is based upon a spirit of mutual consultation and respect.

Unfortunately, however, the Oslo process, based on the principle of land for peace, has been replaced by an approach to peacemaking which seems to be predicated upon the achievement of armed non-belligerence and the unilateral maximization of Israel's control over Palestinian land. Instead of consulting, the current Israeli Government seems to have turned to wholesale expropriation and confiscation of Palestinian land, rapid expansion of Israeli settlements, a programme of road-building designed to carve up Palestinian territory and isolation of Palestinian communities in the interests of enhancing Israeli control. Shockingly, this has led to an alarming increase in the number of families evicted from their homes with accompanying demolitions, allegedly in the interests of guaranteeing security for Israeli citizens.

Israel's emphasis on minimizing security threats is being used to justify a policy of imposing closures on Palestinian territories. These closures have had the effect of preventing Palestinians from reaching their places of work, thus inducing high levels of unemployment and impoverishment in Palestinian society. Ultimately this threatens the security of Palestinian society; the security of a stable income; the security of coming home at night without the fear of finding an eviction or demolition order stuck to your front door; the security of knowing that you can reach a hospital; the security of being able to reside in the West Bank for purposes of study or career even if you hail from Gaza – this security is as legitimate and as vital for the stability and development of Palestinian society as security from random terrorism is for Israeli society. In fact the very arbitrariness of Israeli security decisions about these and other aspects of daily Palestinian life and the uncertainty which it gives rise to and the harassment and humiliation which often accompany the implementation of such decisions, constitute a psychological onslaught on Palestinian society which is as destructive of peace as the threat of terrorist attacks hanging over the heads of Israelis.

The security interests of the two societies are not in fact mutually exclusive. Security for both can be enhanced only when both sides respect each other as fellow human beings destined irrevocably to share the same land.

South Africa's own experience of peacemaking and national reconciliation is based upon the fundamental proposition that the solution to intractable conflict lies not only in the building of trust between parties, but is also to be found in the manner each side to a conflict reaches out across the divide that separates them, in order to establish common ground as a basis for the shared goal of peacemaking and building a future together.

In this regard an essential and basic requirement is the need for all parties who join in building a shared vision and hope for peace together, to recognize mutually the dignity, humanity and universal principles of justice imbuing the positions of all sides.

No party to a conflict has exclusive rights in a process of peacemaking.

South Africa's recognition of the state of Palestine is in its most essential form a statement which is profoundly symbolic and equally categorical in its commitment to the cause of making peace in the Middle East.

At its core, it dignifies the Palestinian people and their claim for nationhood with an equal status to that of their partner in the search of peace, Israel. It recognizes the justice of Palestine's demand to achieve the right to self-determination and an equal place in the community of nations.

South Africa's recognition of Palestine is thus a profoundly and affirmatively pro-peace statement which derives not only from our nation's commitment to the achievement of true and lasting peace in the Middle East but also from our understanding that true peace will only be possible when there is a common basis for mutual, just and equal acceptance of the intrinsic dignity of each side.

We pledge our unwavering support to the Palestinian people in their just quest for peace. We also support those in Israel who share this noble goal and who are courageous enough to voice their belief in this essential foundation for building peace. South Africa applauds your courage and willingness to become part of the process of reaching out across the divide to build common ground and mutual recognition.

We also applaud the courageous stand taken by progressive women of Palestine and Israel who have held hands across the divide in their quest for peace in the region.

My presence at this Conference is not only to honour the justice of a cause I believe in deeply; it is also to express the solidarity of South Africa with the cause of peace. South Africa stands firmly with those who identify with and strive for a just and enduring peace in the Middle East. From this nation, you can expect no less.

FARUK LOGOGLU

Deputy Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

This Conference on the rights of the Palestinian people is taking place at an opportune time. It highlights the fact that at the core of all the troubles in the Middle East region still lies the unresolved plight of the Palestinian people. So long as the Palestinians are denied their inalienable rights, lasting peace in the Middle East will be difficult to achieve.

It is commendable that three important organizations have cooperated in putting this Conference together, the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. This is already an indication of the growing acknowledgement of the importance and urgency of the issues we are expected to discuss in the course of our deliberations today and tomorrow.

The people and Government of Turkey are consistent and strong supporters of the cause of the Palestinian people. The Turkish people have many reasons to act in solidarity with their Palestinian brethren. We have over the years helped to promote the needs and aspirations of the Palestinians and provided direct help towards the realization of their legitimate cause. We did this in a variety of forums, whether under the roof of the United Nations and other international platforms or in the context of our bilateral relations. We will not cease our efforts until such time as they are in a position to exercise and enjoy their rights in full.

We regret that the plight of the Palestinian people continues. With the virtual rupture of the Middle East peace process, they are facing a grave and frustrating situation. Instead of making progress in the realization of their rights, they are facing setbacks and deeper injuries. Israeli settlement activities have undercut the goodwill required for the continuation of negotiations and enemies of peace have made the situation worse by resorting to terrorism. This situation cannot be tolerated.

Turkey viewed the onset of the Middle East peace process as one of the major events of the recent past. We invested a lot of hope, effort and resources in the process in the expectation that it would finally bring stability and security to this troubled region. Turkey still believes that the peace process remains to be the only realistic and preferable way for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and for meeting the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Valuable time has already been lost in the Middle East peace process and as a result the people of Palestine have had to put up with even more suffering. This is not just and it is not right. The peace process must be revived, with all sides ready to fulfil their obligations. Israel should stick to its binding commitments and must in particular refrain from acts that deprive the Palestinian people from the legitimate exercise of their rights and freedoms. Similarly, the peace process should not be held hostage to terrorist acts. Turkey continues to support the peace process and will try to help all appropriate efforts to revive it.

In the meantime, we would like to emphasize that the international community remain alert to the situation and difficulties of the Palestinian people. No people with so much deprivation and frustration can be truly expected to disengage itself from feelings of distrust and hostility. This is why the living conditions of the Palestinian people need to be improved urgently in order to build an adequate level of economic and social well-being and prosperity. For with a sense of well-being and hope for the future, it would be easier for the Palestinian people to put their

best efforts in the making of peace with Israel. We hope that this Conference will lead to more meaningful steps by the international community in the extension of more economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people.

Turkey strongly wishes that the twenty-first century will be a century of peace and cooperation. In this connection, we cannot visualize any grand scheme of peace in the Middle East without the full restitution of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We therefore pray that at the dawn of the new century, we will all be able to applaud and congratulate our Palestinian brethren for having their state established, in full possession of their rights and freedoms and thus in a position to make their creative contributions to humanity and civilization. We know this is not an easy task, but I wish to affirm once again that Turkey will persist in working hard to achieve this long-delayed and just goal. We are confident that this Conference will constitute a positive contribution in this regard.

MOUNIR ZAHRAN

Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva (on behalf of Amre Moussa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt)

I have the honour to participate in this Conference on behalf of Amre Moussa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, who could not be here owing to his engagement to participate in the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity at Addis Ababa. He asked me to convey to you his best wishes for success.

This Conference, convened for the support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in cooperation between the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, is a very important event both in its timing and substance. The Conference takes place at a time when the peace process has reached an impasse as a result of the non-fulfillment by the Israeli Government of its obligations stemming from the peace agreements and principles of international legitimacy.

The essence of the danger of this phase lies in the fact that the essence and the basis of the peace process are at risk.

The peace process, which started in 1991 with the Madrid Conference in order to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), was founded on a solid basis that is the principle of "land for peace", which is the cornerstone of the Oslo Accord.

At present, the peace process in the Middle East faces a serious threat as a result of the non-implementation by Israel of its commitments and the non-observance of the timetables set for it and agreed upon with the Palestinian side and its continuation of the policy of construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Israeli practices constitute a threat to the very essence of the Israeli obligation, which is returning land to its right owners in exchange for peace and security for all.

On the other hand, we caution against allowing Israel to seize the present situation as the international community is preoccupied by the crisis of the inspection of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to evade the Israeli obligations towards the peace process. It should not also be forgotten that Israel also possess weapons of mass destruction which constitute a treat to international peace and security including the whole region. We, therefore, repeat our call for all parties to implement the initiative launched by President Hosni Mubarak in April 1990 concerning the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East, an objective which should be adhered to by all States in the region without exception.

The Israeli policy of building settlements in the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967 deprives the Palestinians from one of their most important rights which is land. And at the time the Israeli side continues its provocation against the Palestinian national sentiments, by continuing its policy of building and expanding the settlements, Israel continues also its policy of encirclement, closure and starvation which led to the deterioration of the economic situation and the increase of unemployment between the Arab population of the occupied territories, including the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

The clear fact in this regard which cannot be ignored by any objective political analyst is that there is a clear relationship between the two pillars of the equation of land for peace. The more the seizure of Palestinian land is accelerated, the more insecurity prevails and the more the chance of peace will be delayed.

The Israeli policy of fait accompli and building of settlements has many facets and various levels. It appears to be a consistent Israeli strategy to reverse the just peace process as agreed upon and as summarized by the equation of land for peace, a process which Egypt started in November 1977.

However, the law of force, if it remains dominant over the force of law, there will be only one consequence, namely violence and more violence, which the region has witnessed for so many years. This not only jeopardizes the national rights of the Palestinian People, but also threatens the rights and interests of all other peoples in the region; in the Arab and Islamic world, in addition to the interests of Europe that shares with the peoples of the region, geography, history and the future.

Therefore, Israel should stop building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, since the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is not part of Israel. They are Palestinian territories and will remain so no matter what Israel does or claim. Force can usurp a right but cannot establish a right. Legitimacy has its well-known sources. It cannot derive from the policy of a fait accompli or the Israeli practices which are unique in the world and all United Nations resolutions ascertain their invalidity.

This leads me to express thanks and appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The work of the Committee has successfully covered all the illegal Israeli practices which threaten the peace process. I would like also to express our dismay for the noncompliance by Israel with the necessity to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian People. This constitutes a legal obligation upon Israel as the "occupying Power", in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949, as well as a political necessity to confidence-building in the peace process.

Against this background, we supported the resolution of the World Health Assembly in May 1997 related to the health conditions of the Arab population in the occupied Arab territories, which reflects the needed attention and promotion of their rights.

Similarly, the deterioration of the situation of workers and employers in the occupied Palestinian territories deserves particular attention since wopkers are in the forefront of those who are seriously affected by the Israeli practices. This is why Egyft has supported an expanding role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in this respect.

Egypt was one of the co-sponsors of the ILO resolution in this respect adopted in June 1996 in the eighty-third session of the International Labour Conference on the issue of the protection of the rights and freedoms of Arab employers and workers in Palestine and the other Arab occupied territories with a view to enhance the peace process in the Middle East. That resolution referred to the Philadelphia Declaration containing a confirmation of the right to work as a basic fundamental right which should be exercised by all peoples on an equal footing regardless of their ethnic, religious or national origins. The International Labour Conference welcomed the peace process which was started by the Madrid Conference in 1991 in the Middle East aiming to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East as a condition sine qua non for social development and economic prosperity. It confirmed that military occupation and the policy of establishing settlements are both inconsistent with the purposes and principles of ILO and international labour standards in accordance with International Labour Conference resolutions of 1974 and 1980 concerning the situation of Arab workers and Israeli settlements in Palestine and other Arab occupied territories. The Director-General of ILO was requested to take the necessary steps to formulate and implement a plan of action and activities for ILO in favour of the Palestinian Authority in various work fields. The Conference expressed its deep concern over the Israeli violations in this respect, as noted by ILO in its annual reports since 1978. A special reference was made to paragraph 25 of the 1995 ILO report which revealed the change in the physical and demographic character of the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories; measures which directly violated international law, and the confiscation of territories and water directly related to the policy of settlement which constitute a serious obstacle to the peace process in the Middle East.

I should also mention the most recent report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) concerning its limited resources which makes it difficult to assume its important humanitarian role. This fact makes it urgent not to reduce its already limited resources, but to increase them in the United Nations budget in order to enable UNRWA to face the growing requirements to fulfil its responsibilities. Donor countries should be encouraged to increase their contributions in this respect. In addition, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should also exercise a complementary role to that of UNRWA.

It is worthwhile to mention in this context that Egypt was among the States which pleaded for the continuation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) unit supporting Palestinian people in the framework of the reform of UNCTAD. We continue to provide the said unit with the necessary financial resources.

Israel should halt its illegal practices which deny the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. All the arbitrary measures taken against the Palestinians such as closure and starvation as a collective punishment in reaction to the angry reaction of the populations as a result of the continuation of the conflict and the frustration

of the Palestinians is due to the lack of any serious hope of a just settlement in the present circumstances. An end to these practices should take place in the light of the peace process which was laid down during the Madrid Conference and after the signature by the Israeli Government of the Oslo accord and the Cairo Agreement and Washington, D.C., Declaration.

The hope of reaching such a just settlement is directly linked to the efficiency and credibility of the international order and the respect of its legal basics and its implementation by different institutions. Hence, the fact that General Assembly resolution ES.10/3 of 15 July 1997 on the settlements and Israeli practices was adopted in an extraordinary session in the framework of "United for peace", by a majority of 139 to 3, with 13 abstentions, is very significant by itself.

The first significance of this resolution concerning the Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories is that those practices put the international community in a situation of helplessness which calls to memory the cold war era when the mutual exchange of "veto" was almost paralyzing the role of the Security Council.

The second significance is that the said General Assembly resolution gains higher legal value compared to other recommendations of the General Assembly since it was based on a United Nations resolution "United for peace". It should therefore be even more respected and complied with.

A third point which is equally relevant in this respect is that the said General Assembly resolution is based on ways and means of enforcing respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories. This calls for a more active involvement of the International Committee of the Red Cross to ensure the implementation by Israel of the Fourth Geneva Convention and stop its practices which constitute a flagrant and continuous violation of its provisions.

The world is witnessing at present a series of important and even crucial developments. It is unacceptable and illogical that the very basics of international law be brought into question or polemics as we are on the eve of a new millennium where the international community looks forward to peace, security and stability. Justice is the prerequisite for peace.

We therefore look forward to the fulfillment by all members of the international community, especially the five permanent members of the Security Council, of their responsibilities in order to attain the common objective of the international order which is the establishment of a secure and stable international community based on the rule of law and equality among states and peoples, especially and above all the right to self-determinations, which is one of the most important collective human rights inscribed in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights for which we are celebrating in 1998 the fiftieth anniversary.

AHMAD MOHAMMED ALI
President of the Islamic Development Bank

On behalf of the Islamic Development Bank, it gives me great pleasure to express my sincere gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for having invited us to participate in this Conference, the purpose of which is to discuss an issue of the very greatest importance that has preoccupied the international community throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

I should also like to thank both the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their active involvement in the preparations for this important Conference.

Thanks are also due to the Kingdom of Belgium for hosting the Conference and for the warm welcome and generous hospitality we have enjoyed, as well as for the excellent arrangements that have been made to ensure the success of the Conference.

Those who follow closely world politics in the second half of the twentieth century are aware that the Middle East has always been and remains one of the most important regions in and for the whole world. However, it has also been one of the most troubled and disturbed during the last three decades of this century. It has been the scene of a continual series of destructive wars that have seriously affected the region on the economic, social and political levels.

It does not take long for anyone who tries to understand the reality of what is going on in this strategic region to understand that it is Palestine and the misfortunes that have rained down on its people since 15 May 1948 which lie at the heart of the conflict and which represent the real reason for these successive political, economic and

social troubles. It is Palestine which has been the cause of these murderous wars, the suffering endured by successive generations, and the psychological and physical changes. Yet each time that the Palestinians have tried to put this unhappy past behind them by complying with United Nations resolutions and attempting to realize their own aspirations, the Israelis have done everything possible to jeopardize this security and stability and to sabotage the ties of trust between the parties involved.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine territories in 1948, the Palestinians have been obliged to emigrate and, in wave after wave, to leave their homeland, under the force of political, economic and social pressures, many military decisions resulting in the expropriation of their property, the destruction of their homes and the imposition of collective sanctions against them, regardless of all the charters of human rights and the resolutions of the United Nations.

Subsequent to Israel's occupation of all the Palestinian territories and of some territories of neighbouring Arab states in 1967, the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people have deteriorated: according to a 1997 report of UNCTAD, nearly 40 per cent of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and 23 per cent of those in the West Bank live below the poverty line. The details are given in a study that has been submitted to this Conference.

Initially, Israel seized more than 53 per cent of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and established colonies of settlers there in response to what it termed security concerns. It proposes to seize further territories in order to build new settlements or expand existing ones, and to construct a road network to link those settlements with each other and then with other Israeli towns and to isolate Arab areas from each other and break their ties with the Arab city of Jerusalem. All these acts constitute a flagrant violation of the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, human rights, and the agreements reached under the auspices of the United States of America and the Russian Federation. Such acts also constitute a failure to live up to the promises and commitments made by Israel at the Madrid Conference, when it promised to freeze the construction of settlements and to refrain from any measures likely to affect the final status negotiations.

Israel has, furthermore, seized control of the majority of the water resources, thereby depriving the Palestinians of the additional share they were awarded under the Oslo II Accord, concluded on 28 September 1995, a share which was set at 28 million cubic metres, in addition to the estimates of the World Bank mission to the occupied territories, which amounted to between 600 million and 800 million cubic metres. In fact, the share allocated to the Palestinians is a mere 200 million and 228 million cubic metres, and of that, 86 per cent is used by Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, so that the Palestinians are using only 34 per cent of their share, or 40 cubic metres per capita, as compared with an estimated Israeli per capita consumption of 375 cubic metres.

With regard to the Palestinian economy, Israel has turned it into a weak economy dependent upon its own economy by depriving it of a proper foundation. For example:

(a) Israel has seized agricultural land and the main sources of revenue, thereby promoting an increase in the unemployment rate;

(b) It has promulgated laws and taken the necessary decisions to ensure complete control over Palestinian imports and exports, thus causing a serious deterioration in the trade balance and the Palestinian balance of payments. In this context, the Israeli Government has placed every imaginable obstacle in the way of Palestinian exports to foreign markets. Numerous official and informal bodies have expressed profound disquiet with regard to the obstacles created by Israel with a view to preventing the implementation of the resolution adopted by the European Union authorizing access to European markets for Palestinian products on the basis of a certificate of Palestinian origin. Israel has also prohibited the import of the equipment and material necessary to build up a Palestinian industry and has nipped in the bud any prospective competition on domestic or foreign markets from Palestinian products;

(c) Israel has imposed the new shekel as the official currency in Palestine, with all the negative consequences that involves;

(d) It has diverted tax revenues derived from indirect imports to the Israeli treasury instead of using them to strengthen the Palestinian economy. According to a 1997 report of UNCTAD, the losses sustained by the Palestinians as a result of this were estimated, in 1992 alone, at $195 million, and, in 1995, at $155 million;

(e) The seaport: despite the vital importance of constructing a seaport in the Gaza Strip, in accordance with the Oslo Accords, Israel continues to procrastinate and impede the implementation of such a project;

(f) With regard to tourism, political instability and the lack of security have led tourists to refrain from visiting Palestine. Yet Palestine is one of the richest regions of the world in religious and historical sites; in 1966 (that is to say, immediately prior to the Israeli occupation), the number of tourists who had visited the West Bank had risen to 617,000. This contrasts with barely 100,000 for the period 1987-1989.

As a result, annual losses to the Palestinian public treasury have risen to some $70 million (according to the Jordanian yearbook of general statistics for 1986), and a large part of the Palestinian workforce has thus been deprived of employment.

With regard to the infrastructure:

(a) As a result of the occupation, the political instability and the lack of financial resources made available to the Palestinian Authority and municipalities, the infrastructure in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has seriously deteriorated: the main roads are in dire need of repair and maintenance; rural roads are few and in a poor state; the water supply system is dilapidated and inadequate; and the sewerage system is ineffective, since few houses (barely 34 per cent) are connected to it, and the rate of waste is very high, which causes a significant amount of pollution, promotes the spread of diseases and impedes movement;

(b) Similarly, the electric system is in need of maintenance: its production capacity must be increased, and it must be developed and extended in order to meet the needs of citizens and of investors in the sectors of industry and agriculture in this region, where investment is encouraged by the international community. According to Palestinian statistics, the electric system in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will require investment of more than $1 billion:

Designation	*Millions of United States dollars*
Repair of the distribution network	130
Distribution network	150
Equipment: connection and links to the main distribution network	150
Independent generators	650
Links to the international network in Egypt and Jordan	150
Total	1 230

(c) Education is also facing serious obstacles: schools and universities are closed several days each year because of political unrest. School buildings are dilapidated and in need of repair and extension. New school buildings must be constructed in order to meet the needs of continued demographic growth. The working conditions of teachers are extremely difficult and the salaries they receive are barely sufficient to meet their basic needs;

(d) The remarks I have made about education apply equally to the health sector, where conditions are often even more disastrous.

Aware of the particularly sensitive and delicate character of the city, the co-sponsors of the peace process have postponed negotiations on the issue of Al-Quds until the final stage.

At issue is the site of the holiest of the three holy sites of Islam and an important sacred site for both Christians and Jews.

Disregarding such considerations, Israel has not refrained from modifying geographical and demographic structures and, announcing, on 28 June 1997, the annexation of the eastern part of the city, expelling a large number of its inhabitants, demolishing their houses, and expropriating their land by military decree in order to construct settlements to house Jewish immigrants from abroad.

It has also proceeded to demolish several of the city's neighbourhoods in order to construct new Jewish residential areas in their place.

The international community receives daily reports of some new abuse committed by Israel against this holy city: roads have been constructed in order to isolate Al-Quds from other Palestinian cities; Arab institutions (educational, health and cultural) have been destroyed, not to mention the development projects designed to improve the standard of living of the Palestinian inhabitants of the city which have never been initiated because of the obstacles placed in their path.

The living conditions of the Palestinian people are becoming more acute and deteriorating day by day. As a result, businesses and economic establishments are degenerating, and the infrastructure in the towns and territories is in dire need of construction and reconstruction in order to attract local and foreign investment and encourage such investment to finance economic and social development projects. The standards of living of the Palestinian could thereby be improved, the poverty in which the people are living could be alleviated, and the rate of unemployment could be contained. That is the only way that the Palestinian people will feel any real benefit from the peace process which it has supported since the peace agreements were concluded in 1993.

The international community must therefore exert political and economic pressure on Israel in order to persuade it to respect the commitments it has made in the context of the current peace process, as well as international rules and resolutions. Israel must be persuaded to negotiate seriously on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, so that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace may be established in the region.

It is the economic responsibility of the international community to improve the current critical condition of the domestic Palestinian economy. Thirty years of occupation have destroyed everything and left the Palestinian people in a position from which it cannot extract itself by its own means alone. With all due respect to the sincere efforts made by some countries and international and non-governmental organizations, many promises of aid to the Palestinian people have not been kept. International aid and assistance must become a reality and take the form not only of financial assistance in cash but also of international, public and private investment in all areas of development and reconstruction.

Against this background, the Palestinian economy might perhaps have greater need of a large integrated development project along the lines of the Marshall Plan, which provided for the reconstruction of the economy of Western Europe after the Second World War, than of simple separate aid programmes unrelated to each other.

Aware of the role it has to play in improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people and alleviating the effects of the poverty suffered by that people, the Islamic Development Bank, in its capacity as an international financial institution and like other international institutions, has undertaken to assume its responsibilities, as far as it is able and as far as its resources permit, despite the obstacles placed by the Israeli authorities in the way of the implementation of projects (the refusal of, or delay in granting, permits; delays in delivering construction materials; and the closure of building sites owing to the absence of workers prevented from reaching the site as a result of political unrest and travel difficulties).

Despite all these difficulties, the Bank has already contributed to the financing of more than 40 construction and development projects in such vital sectors as education, health, food and housing, and has approved for those purposes some $52 million. Many other economic and social projects are being considered in order to benefit the country, which is in need of every effort from donor countries, international institutions and local, regional and foreign investors. The list of projects which the Bank has carried out or is considering is contained in the study that has been distributed separately to the participants in this Conference.

With the experience it has acquired in this field, the Bank wishes to state that it is ready to cooperate with any international or regional institution that wishes to promote development and reconstruction projects in this country, which the international community is anxious to help put an end to its long ordeal, so that its children may finally enjoy freedom, tranquillity and a just and comprehensive peace.

SIMBARASHE S. MUMBENGEGWI

Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the European Union
(on behalf of Robert G. Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe and Chairman of the Organization of African Unity)

On behalf of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), I wish to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their collaboration in making this important conference a reality. I would also like to join the expressions of appreciation made by those who spoke before me for the excellent arrangements made by the Kingdom of Belgium as host of the Conference. Allow me at this point to commend Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his dedicated service and dynamic stewardship of the Committee.

Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, is seriously concerned at the current status of the peace process, particularly the negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis which, having started off well following the signing of the Oslo Accords, has since encountered a number of serious setbacks. Quite clearly, the disappointing lack of progress in these talks stems from the extreme and hard-line position adopted by the Israeli Government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Unilateral decisions and actions taken by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, are a clear manifestation of this hard-line approach and its lack of commitment to the full implementation of the agreement signed with the Palestinians.

This has resulted in the deterioration of the security situation in the area and placed the peace process in serious jeopardy.

The Security Council and the General Assembly have been overwhelmingly supportive of the series of bold steps taken by the leaders of Israel and the PLO since the Madrid Conference of 1991. The signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington, D.C., opened the way for concrete progress in the Gaza Strip, Jericho and Hebron. These have been landmarks in the gradual improvement in relations among the parties concerned, which began to shape what had largely come to be accepted as an irreversible peace process.

OAU has been, and remains, a strong advocate of this process, which is the only viable option for peace and stability in the region. Similarly, OAU has kept the situation in the Middle East, and particularly the situation in Palestine, as two permanent agenda items of the Council of Ministers. OAU has also been solidly behind the peace process, and by the same token, has consistently opposed any attempt to disrupt the peace process.

The convening in 1997 of the tenth emergency session of the General Assembly on the illegal Israeli activities in occupied East Jerusalem was indicative, however, of the disquiet with which Member States have been following the latest developments in the Middle East. OAU does not recognize Israel's annexation of Jerusalem.

As was clearly articulated during the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government at Harare, we regard as illegal Israel's bid to change the legal status, demographic composition and character of occupied East Jerusalem through the implementation of a policy aimed at the artificial creation of a Jewish majority in the city.

This constitutes a flagrant violation of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 252 (1968) and 338 (1973), which emphasize the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. We consider all measures and actions taken by Israel to change the demographic composition and legal status of Jerusalem as null and void, as they violate the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Principles and the subsequent agreements.

For us in Africa, the situation in Palestine and the Middle East is a matter of grave concern, which continues to be a permanent item on the agenda of the OAU Council of Ministers as well as that of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

OAU has passed resolutions welcoming the peace process and exhorting all parties involved, particularly the PLO and Israel, to persevere in consolidating the peace process in order to bring to fruition the peace and prosperity that have eluded the region for several decades.

OAU's position is that the international community must save the Middle East region, at this critical juncture, from the throes of conflict and war. The provisions of the existing agreements and accords concluded between the PLO and Israel must be complied with in a sincere manner.

The Israeli leadership should honour its commitments and resolve all pending issues with the Palestinian Authority, which include the immediate reversal of their alarming actions of building new settlements in East Jerusalem and other occupied Palestinian lands.

Finally, I wish to observe that the hopes of the long-suffering peoples of the Middle East had been raised by the vision of a future of peace. Their leaders, with the support of the international community, had made significant strides in that direction.

Solutions will not be durable, however, if intransigence prevails over the capacity for compromise.

OAU is convinced that the most promising opportunity for peace in a generation is here and must be seized in earnest.

We urge the parties to resume contacts, in good faith, on the basis of agreements reached and to seek inspiration in their own achievements since Madrid in their search for lasting peace.

NASSIR ALASSAF

Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Belgium

(on behalf of His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faysal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia)

It gives me great pleasure, on this occasion, to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Secretariat of the League of Arab States, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference for their efforts in organizing this Conference. I should also like to thank the Government of Belgium for hosting this Conference, which is being held at a time when the Middle East is going through a crucial period as a result of Israeli intransigence, the provocative measures and policies being applied by the Prime Minister of Israel, his refusal to live up to his commitments to the Palestinians, and the stalemate in negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts.

This Conference reflects the concern and alarm felt by the international community over the violations of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people by the Israeli authorities. These violations constitute not only a deliberate assault on a people living in security on its own territory and the confiscation of its lands and properties, but also a disregard for humanitarian principles and blatant defiance of international resolutions.

Despite international recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on its own territory, Israel's aggressive behaviour - including, among other things, the physical elimination of the Palestinian people and attempts to distort the history of Palestine, the destruction of religious and cultural institutions and the alteration of the demographic situation - is aimed at the total elimination of the Palestinian identity, without regard to legitimacy and international public opinion.

The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is following with great attention the course of events in Palestine and the stalemate in the peace process, is concerned over Israel's intransigence and policies that have led to the stalemate in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and its failure to implement the agreements and commitments that had been reached with the Palestinian side in the full view of the international community. Of late there has been irrefutable evidence of this in the form of Israel's obstinate disregard of the foundations of peace and its refusal to carry out its commitments toward the Palestinians. Not only is Israel's policy of establishing settlements in the occupied territories contrary to the Geneva Conventions, it is also not in conformity with international resolutions and the recommendations of the Madrid Conference and other treaties that have been concluded. Furthermore, the territories under the Palestinian Authority are suffering from various forms of hardship, including famine and the collective punishments of closure and blockade, while the whole range of measures and practices of the Government of Israel aimed at changing the identity of Jerusalem and imposing a new situation bears witness to Israel's intransigence and deliberate sabotaging of the peace process, which exposes the region to ever greater changes and destabilization.

The views of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia concerning the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people stem from its unshakable conviction of the legitimacy of those rights and its commitment to the objectives and principles of international instruments, in particular, the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the League of Arab States and the Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and the exile of the Palestinian people, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been deeply concerned about the injustice which that people has endured, and it has devoted substantial efforts to putting an end to it, providing various types of material and moral support. Since the first glimmer of peace began to dawn in the region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has supported the Madrid Conference and backed all efforts aimed at bringing about Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and the transfer of greater powers to the Palestinian Authority.

The question of Jerusalem, which lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, remains the focal point for the Arab and Islamic world and the central issue of the Palestinian problem. Consequently, Israel's practices and unlawful acts in the Holy City cannot but have a negative impact on the peace process as a whole, inasmuch as the aim of those practices is to Judaize Jerusalem and alter its religious characteristics. This runs the risk of reducing the peace process to nothing and thus destroying any hope of peace in the region.

I urge the sponsors of the Middle East peace process and the international community to undertake positive action immediately with a view to putting an end to Israel's intransigence in the most sensitive areas of the peace process, and to deal with the question of Jerusalem. That is the most serious problem of the entire Arab-Israeli conflict, and it must be solved during the period established in the context of the peace process, in accordance with internationally binding resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for Israel's withdrawal from all the territories occupied in 1967, and resolution 252 (1968), which concerns the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appreciates the efforts of the European Union in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, its position on the building of Israeli settlements, and its financial and economic assistance to the Palestinian economy for the purpose of improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Like all donor countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides financial aid, amounting to $200 million, over and above its annual contribution to the budget of UNRWA which is estimated at $1.2 million, in addition to a number of other voluntary contributions and donations. We hope that the European Union will play a larger role in the peace process, one commensurate with the volume and importance of its economic role, and that it will induce Israel to reconsider its intransigent attitude and display greater flexibility, in accordance with international resolutions and the agreements signed by both sides.

If justice is to be credible, and if the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people are to be defended, there should be no double standard distinguishing between one people and another or one State and another; on the contrary, the same standard should be used impartially. It is the task of this Conference to give material form to that principle, in accordance with the spirit of justice and equality in the service of peace, not only in the Middle East but throughout the international community.

Lastly, I should like to thank the United Nations and other international and local organizations for their past and continuing support for the rights of the Palestinian people, and for their good work in organizing this Conference. I should also like to thank the Government of Belgium for hosting the Conference and for its fruitful efforts in support of the rights of the Palestinian people.

IV. GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

Promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people - a key to peace in the Middle East

The need to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people and to promote economic and social development

The Middle East peace process: the current situation and prospects

Statements by eminent persons

MS. SHULAMIT ALONI
Meretz Party, former Minister of Education of Israel

I am an Israeli. I think I am an Israeli patriot and I would like to get some help from Albert Camus to explain to you my credo. You know that during the Second World War, Albert Camus wrote letters to his friends—to his German friend—and I want to quote two sentences. In his first letter, he says: "There are means that cannot be excused and I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice. I don't want just greatness for it, particularly a greatness born of blood and falsehood. I want to keep my country alive by keeping justice alive." In a second letter to his friend, he says: "If at times we seem to prefer justice to our country, this is because we simply wanted to love our country in justice as we wanted to love her in truth and in hope."

So now we understand that I do not represent here the current Government of Israel. But I do represent a huge number of Israelis who believe in justice and in peace, who believe that we are strong enough to understand the limit of power, who understand that we will never have freedom, peace and tranquility as long as we are occupiers. Because the occupier and the occupied are chained together like the guard and the prisoner and only when we break this chain and give to the Palestinians their rights and their freedom will we be free as well.

You know, all of us learned in school the old saying of our sages: "Do not do unto your fellow human being that which you would not wish to have done to you." But we do it. We do it and it is a shame. In the Declaration of Independence of the Israeli State of 15 May 1948, among other things, it is written: "On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in the land of Israel." This recognition of the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their own State is irrevocable. But this resolution included the right and the need to build in our State as well as in Israel. And because we endorsed this resolution we had to endorse the right of the Palestinians to their own State. And this is not the only resolution. People were talking yesterday of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and recalling the Camp David Accords speaking of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the Madrid summit and the Oslo Accords and the meeting on 13 September in the White House, with the shaking of hands and declaring mutual recognition of the two peoples. Nevertheless, we are still occupying the land which belongs to the Palestinians. And it is an occupied land. It is not under the jurisdiction of the State of Israel. It is under military administration and we will surely remember it. So we cannot even claim our rights to this land because it is still under military administration.

Nevertheless, under the sacred world of security, we supply the greediness of the Palestinian land, the greediness of our zealots who believe that everything belongs to them and the word "security" is answering everything and this Government is pouring a tremendous amount of money and is subsidizing more settlements and sending more people to settle in the occupied territories. And the more that go there, the more our lives are becoming complicated because Israel is not under a threat anymore. We are no longer the victims of the world, although this Government is very happy to manipulate our fears and our traumas in order to use more and more power against whom? Against those who don't have power. When I say against those who don't have power, you have to remember that what they are doing is as if we are the ultimate victim in the world.

Now people are asking how come that the Jewish people, who have suffered so much, are not sensitive to the sufferings of others. Whoever has studied psychology for even one year in a university knows that people who think that they are victims, can victimize others very easily. They are not sensitive to others. But we are not victims anymore. We are strong and this manipulation is a shame because it is a developed country, a strong country and without understanding the limit of power, we will destroy what we have achieved and not build on what we have achieved.

Then comes the question of another sacred place—Jerusalem. Yes, Jerusalem is a holy town. Yes, the Jewish people were dreaming of Jerusalem. Yes, Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. But in East Jerusalem, there live almost 200,000 Palestinians. Now 200,000 is a huge number—it is a town. They have no citizenship, they have no civil rights, they are cut off from their hinterland by settlements surrounding them. To the people from the West Bank, Jerusalem is as sacred to them as to us. Jerusalem is their cultural, economic, religious centre. They are cut off from the Palestinians who live in Jerusalem with no privileges, no citizenship. And we are turning our eyes to everything but this is our holy town.

Now there is the question of Jerusalem, although it was postponed to the end. The Israeli Government did not postpone this because they built again and again more places round the town to cut it off from the Palestinian people and last year, they started a kind of secret deportation of the Palestinian people. You should be aware of those facts and we have to change it. There is a huge number of Israelis who are aware of it and we know that people who live on this soil, will die on this soil.

But it is very easy to manipulate our people, because of the past and because of a document written in 1964 by the Palestinian people which is known as the "Palestinian Covenant". This document was written as a call to war. From their point of view, it is justified. From the Israeli point of view, we say, you see, they want to throw us to the sea. How can they? We are not there and we are strong. It is very easy to manipulate it and if you follow what is going on in the statements of our Prime Minister Netanyahu, he is working on this document—this Palestinian Covenant —bringing it up again and again in spite of the fact that for our part we have said many times that it is null. Nevertheless, they are bringing it up again and again and it is very easy to bring people again into a kind of a trauma of fear by manipulating those fears.

Now I have a suggestion. I am sorry that my friend Nabil Shaath is not here, but we will meet and I will discuss it with him. In 1988, in Algiers, the Palestinian people declared their sovereignty as a State. They do not have it yet but this was a beautiful declaration and one of the greatest Arab poets, if not the greater one, Mahmoud Darwish, wrote a declaration of independence—a beautiful document of peace, dignity, human rights, democracy and development and I can only suggest to the Palestinian people that they endorse again this beautiful document which is a declaration of independence and publish it in order to bring it to the attention of their people and our people because it shows completely different intentions, because it can open hearts which are still closed with fear. This kind, because we play with words—and what are we doing here if not playing with words—this document can lift up a new spirit.

If I will sum up, although in the beginning I just wanted to say that I am seconding Mr. Nabil Shaath, who is talking so much, we are saying the same things in different places but I want to emphasize to you that this Government is making mistakes. I want you to remember that the occupied territories are not under the jurisdiction of Israel. That is why all the settlements there are breaking international law and the decisions of the United Nations. We have no right to settle there. In the beginning the settlements were also under the secret word of "security".

I want you to do something more. It is not enough only to blame the Israelis. It was very easy for this Government and for others to manipulate our fears because of the Hamas terrorist acts. So while speaking of the rights of the Palestinians, we have to mention again and again that this terror is not going to help to bring freedom to the Palestinian people and that those people are working against the well-being of the people.

The second thing is you will have to go back to your respective countries and to make every attempt to attract investment money to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank for the Palestinian people. They are poor, they do not have any enterprises of their own and the international community should do whatever is possible to help them to build their economy. I am very proud of my senior friend Shimon Peres, who started in this respect and he is going from one place to the other, persuading some international companies to invest in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. I hope that you people can help as well.

My last comment: only God could do things by words. We are talking but if there is no plan of action, very little will come out of it. So let us think how we can promote peace in the Middle East and make us Israelis understand that we will gain our freedom and peace and prosperity only by respecting the sovereign rights of our neighbours, working together with them. It can be done but it can be destroyed as well. Let us wish for the best.

NABIL SHAATH
Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Palestinian Authority

It is a great honour to address you today and to attend this very important Conference, a conference that has gone on for some time and has produced eminent results. I am one of those who has been honoured by being invited to conferences like this one in the last seven, eight or nine years—I don't know how long it has lasted—but I have enjoyed every one of the sessions in Europe, Asia and Africa, a variety of places. It is very important that we continue. These conferences embody two very important entities—the United Nations and its Member States, working through the United Nations and its international legitimacy. The role of the United Nations has been questioned in a variety of places but it is always, we always remember, that in the worst of crises, it is the United Nations and its bodies and its legitimacy that saves the day and I think, in the final analysis, what we have seen in the Iraqi crisis and the role played by the Security Council and by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, of course with the help, great help of France, England, the Russian Federation and China, from a variety of places, enabled us to overcome a horrible crisis and a devastating war, totally needless. As diplomacy showed, it can, through the legitimacy of the United Nations and through the emphasis on Security Council resolutions, the full implementation of these resolutions, and on the international legality embodied therein, and through diplomatic effort and patient peace processes, one can reach results that can avoid devastating war.

It is in this spirit that the Palestinian people have entrusted their case for a very long time to the protective hand of the United Nations and its Member States. If we have gone to a peace process that is based on negotiation with the Israelis—and that was a very important turnaround, in which the two parties really abandoned confrontation for reconciliation—we always remained within the context of the boundary of the solution that was made by international legality and the United Nations. Without these boundaries and without the effort to make the rules of the game based on these boundaries, it would be very difficult to negotiate and to continue negotiation, particularly when the princes of peace, when those who adopted the peace of the brave on the Israeli side, are not there. You need to continue to emphasize that there are rules of the game that must be respected and there is the United Nations behind them whenever you are in doubt.

Implementation of Security Council resolutions and of international legality in our case is extremely important. Surely we accepted t o go away from absolute justice to relative justice. Surely the Palestinian people, after years of occupation, deprivation and exile, have really accepted to share Palestine, accepted that their rights on Palestine are somehow not necessarily opposite and negative and in opposition to the rights of Israelis in Palestine, that the two peoples can share Palestine within norms and within certain rules that allow them to set up their independent State and exercise their right of self-determination on part of Palestine. We accepted that that part be the 22 per cent occupied in 1967 for which international legality clearly defines as a land that the Palestinian people have a right to regain and that its occupation is inadmissible and the self-determination of the Palestinian people can be exercised on it. That is the basis—accepting this relative justice and negotiating a deal in which the Palestinian people and the Israelis can live together in two separate independent States, side by side, cooperating, coordinating,

in harmony, and accept being part of this broader Middle East and accept regional cooperation that will secure for their people prosperity, security, peace and rights, including the rights of sovereignty and full independence for the Palestinian people. That was the essence of the peace process.

Shulamit Aloni was at the first session in Paris in which Palestinians and Israeli officials attended a peace conference. I remember she wouldn't talk to me then. Israeli law prevented her from talking to a PLO official at that time in 1988. I remember telling the audience then that for a very long time we, the Palestinian people, somehow thought of ourselves as the true mother in the Solomon story in which the child was to be identified and the mother had to be identified. And I said that the Palestinian people accepted not to have the child at all rather than divide it. But then there came a time when we felt that land was not exactly like children and sometimes you had to divide the land to save the children. It is on this premise that our move from confrontation to reconciliation took place. It is the leaders of the two parties, Yasser Arafat on one side, and Yitzhak Rabin on the other, and the whole camp of peace in Israel behind Yitzhak Rabin and the whole Palestinian people behind Yasser Arafat that made it possible, within the boundaries of the United Nations and Security Council resolutions, to negotiate a peace that we hoped would be durable and just.

This is not moving anymore. I am not blaming everything on the present Government of Israel; we had problems with the previous Governments, problems about interpretation of security, sovereignty, the transfer of authority. But we never complained to the United Nations throughout the life of Yitzhak Rabin and the man who followed him, Shimon Peres, because the peace process was going on. There was progress, difficulties, but there were progress. We accepted the negotiating arena as a substitute for every other arena and in good faith we made progress in the first two-and-half-years of implementation of the peace process.

Now, for a year and a half, we have had a new Government in Israel that believes it can rewrite this peace process, can change the rules of the game, can abandon international legality, and can force the Palestinians through intransigence to change their expectations, as Mr. Netanyahu says, "adjust their expectations", i.e., swallow surrender and give up the rights for which they have struggled for a very long time. It cannot work. We accepted an interim settlement in which we regain the West Bank and Gaza, with the exception of settlements, Jerusalem and military locations, so that we can negotiate these three items in the permanent peace process. Therefore we never accepted to negotiate in the permanent settlement the partition of the West Bank. It was the partition of Palestine, with 22 per cent in the West Bank, including Jerusalem and Gaza, and 78 per cent for Palestinian land occupied in 1948 that became Israel. Therefore, in the Oslo process, there is no such thing as negotiating the status of the West Bank. There is no such thing as partitioning Gaza and the West Bank. There is simply discussion of the status of Jerusalem and the status of the settlements and the final borders, and that is a totally different matter.

If you were going to accept an interim settlement, you have to have a fixed target, not an illusive, moving target. You cannot say I will delay discussion of Jerusalem for three years and in the meanwhile have the occupier of Jerusalem expand Jerusalem and expropriate the identity cards of Jerusalemites and throw them out of their city. You cannot say we are delaying discussion of the settlements and see the settlements grow in the meanwhile. Therefore by the time you sit down to negotiate them, they have swallowed half of Palestine. The maps that had been tendered by Mr. Sharon and Mr. Mordechai and have been sent on a roadshow, are maps that give them, according to their view, 65 per cent maximum—Sharon, 52 per cent minimum—Mordechai, of the West Bank, leaving "bantustanets". You know the bantustans of South Africa were large, but these are very small bantustans; they are almost like small medieval city-states and village-states in which there is absolutely no connectivity, killing the Palestinian dream, destroying a chance of a viable Palestinian state, therefore inciting Palestinians and Israelis against that historic reconciliation that they took on the basis of international legality.

This is the status of the peace process at this time. Please do not get lost in rhetoric because Mr. Netanyahu's rhetoric at this time is that, instead of explaining what is needed to make the peace process go on, he just explains that he can't go on with the peace process because he blames it all on the Palestinians or some other parties. It is security one time, the Palestinian Charter another, his budget a third time, fragility of his coalition another time, the Iraqi crisis a fourth time. He is always explaining why history must be delayed. He is always explaining why international legality cannot prevail. The problem at the present have to do basically with the necessity for redeployment to give the Palestinians the West Bank and Gaza, with the exception of Jerusalem, settlements, and final borders. That he does not want to do. In the meanwhile, he is not willing to accept any limitations on expansion of settlements, destruction of Palestinian homes and taking away expropriated Palestinian land. At the same time, he is keeping the Palestinian territories under siege. One would have waited. We have. This people are stoic and patient. They could have waited for years if settlements would stop, if they were not under siege, if there was a goodwill to implement international legality on the table.

The present situation is impossible to take. It is very serious. The Palestinians have not yet opted for a return to confrontation and I hope that we will not need to. We always thought of this peace process as irreversible. We always thought of it as a historical step that cannot change. But at the same time the Palestinian people cannot wait when they see their land being encroached upon, when they see their towns under siege, when they see the dream destroyed. It is here where we need your help, both as United Nations, as Member States, and as non-governmental organizations. We need to put pressure on Netanyahu while maintaining the people-to-people relationships between

Israelis and Palestinians because that is something we don't ever want to see reversed. The relations of Palestinians and Israelis have been the major achievement of this peace process so far. We talk to each other. We've known each other. We've come to accept each other as neighbours and partners but we need at the same time to put pressure on a Government that won't go through the process, that won't make that dream possible. We need your pressure. We need Security Council resolutions and settlements. We need an expert meeting of the High Contracting Parties to find out ways and means of enforcing the Fourth Geneva Convention to stop settlement activities. We need to expand the ability of the Palestinian delegation in the United Nations to function. We need to end the siege. We need to allow the Palestinian people a chance to continue the hope because killing the hope means killing the peace and means going back to confrontation. That is our plea. To the non-governmental organizations represented here, and to the Member States and international organizations, your help will define whether it is possible to keep that peace process alive or that we may have to face another tragic confrontation. My hope is for success of the peace process.

HARRY G. BARNES, JR.
Director, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights Programs, the Carter Center

I appreciate the invitation to represent President James E. Carter and the Carter Center at this Conference devoted to the Palestinian people and their rights and aspirations. Since he left the White House, President Carter has, of course, been particularly well-known for his work in helping to resolve international crises. What are less well known are the Center's efforts to eradicate or control diseases and to boost agricultural production by small farmers. In whatever activity we are involved, we try to follow certain basic rules: we do not duplicate the work of others, but rather seek to collaborate wherever we can; we do not take sides in a dispute but pursue outcomes that help to reconcile the legitimate interests of those involved; and we are prepared to take risks, including the risk of failure. What follows, within this general context, are some of my impressions, not a statement of Carter Center positions.

With respect to the theme of this Conference, President Carter's dedication to a meaningful peace process goes back a whole generation and I will return to that aspect. My own direct acquaintance with the problems of the region is much more recent. For the last several years I have been visiting the area in my capacity as the board member of the National Endowment for Democracy responsible for oversight of the Endowment supported programmes in the Middle East, including in the Palestinian lands. I also had the opportunity in late 1995 and early 1996, this time in my Carter Center role, to organize and carry out an election-observing mission, together with the National Democratic Institute, for the Palestinian elections, a mission that President Carter co-chaired.

Those of you who were there at the time will recall the excitement and the pride with which the elections were conducted by the Palestinians. Despite some problems, the overwhelming impression was one of Palestinians seizing the opportunity to take on the responsibility for managing their own affairs and confidence that they could carry out those tasks successfully.

Sadly, within a few weeks, violence again erupted and disrupted the process so hopefully set in motion by the Oslo Accords. It of course was not the first instance of violence. Just months before the elections, Prime Minister Rabin had been assassinated. Nor can anyone predict when violence will vanish from the scene. At the same time, I was struck, during my last brief visit a few weeks ago, with the degree of apathy I found with regard to the peace process. It was not only that the high hopes of the January 1996 elections had not been realized, but that no headway had been made for some time in carrying out the Oslo Accords. And most depressing of all, I encountered a feeling that progress was unlikely and that there was noting much anyone could or would do about it.

Before examining the implications of that pessimistic evaluation, I think it might be useful to note that September 1998 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Camp David Accord. President Carter recalls that in March 1977 he met with the then Prime Minister Rabin and found little interest on Rabin's part in any mediation effort to end the constant cycle of violence. In the ensuing two months he met also with a number of Arab leaders and, save for President Sadat, found no one who responded with any enthusiasm to the idea of a peace initiative. And yet, a year and a half later, what President Carter called the seemingly incompatible pair, President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin, actually met at Camp David with President Carter and even more surprisingly concluded an agreement.

What was Camp David? Aside from nearly two weeks of intensive and exceptionally difficult negotiations, it was what was called a Framework for Peace in the Middle East Agreed at Camp David. It was not a peace treaty, nor a comprehensive settlement, but it launched a new and at the time more hopeful start in the search for peace, though it was also widely criticized. Within that framework, the focus was on peace and security and, importantly for our gathering, it was also on the Palestinian people. It was very clear on this point, saying that "the negotiations must recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements."

In many ways, the Camp David accord foreshadowed the Oslo agreements, but my point here is rather another one, namely the fact that despite great obstacles it was possible to break out of the mold of violence and mistrust and to make a new start.

My second point is that if this could happen once 20 years ago, it could happen again. Yet it obviously has not. Why not?

Let me list some reasons that strike me as pertinent:

1. The carrying out of the Oslo Accords has degenerated much of the time into each side blaming the other rather than seeking solutions. Hence such trust as earlier existed has been dissipated, in part because the negotiators are also the implementers. Because the process is carried out in stages, failure to implement the previous stage produces lack of credibility and inhibits further negotiations. Hence more blame casting or apathy.

2. Fundamental issues like Jerusalem, settlements, borders, water and refugees, saved under Oslo for the final status talks, thus look even more impossible to resolve when even the easier earlier goals remain unfulfilled. And yet no lasting agreement can be reached without meaningful concessions from both sides in areas that are important to them. That lesson does not seem to have yet been fully learned.

3. There are also some basic differences in overall perceptions: for Israelis the process is too fast and too risky for their security needs; for the Palestinians it is too slow and too minimal to be satisfying. Palestinians see Israelis as grudgingly giving and then giving little of value. Israelis see Palestinians as always demanding and offering nothing in exchange.

4. Having to adapt to changed circumstances on each side complicates reaching policy consensus within the society. In Israel there are the daily problem that stem from the diversity of views within the cabinet. In Palestine there are the relations between the executive and the Legislative Council which still need sorting out.

5. External support for each side has become less certain, either because of new priorities for some of the Arab States, or in the case of Israel the disputes over religious matters like conversions which have concerned the Diaspora.

6. Given the depth of the difficulties, third party mediation might be able to rebuild some of the trust lost, but that would require continuing, intensive and not just periodic involvement. Even then, given the other factors I have listed, that might still not be enough.

The usual recipe for stalled negotiations is a large dose of political will for all parties. There are a lot of reasons why people could now say that will is not present or even that it cannot be. But I still would argue that, just as at Camp David it was possible to find and apply political will, so now, 20 years later, in very different circumstances, it ought to be possible too. Let me end by quoting President Carter, when he spoke to the American Congress in September 1978 about the then just concluded Camp David Accord: He said that "we are privileged to see the chance for one of the sometimes rare bright moments in human history—a chance that may offer the way to peace". Is it too much to find another chance before the end of the century?

MICHAEL HINDLEY

Member of the European Parliament (Labour, United Kingdom) and Co-Chairman of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation

May I attempt a difficult discipline for politicians and that is to be brief and to the point and that I be practical rather than stay at the rhetorical level. My sympathies should be obvious by my presence so I will spare time and not go into a sentimental or political statement as to why I have sympathy with the Palestinian cause. May I bring to this meeting the greetings of the association of which I have the honour to be a Vice-President, that is, the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation. They wish to extend their best wishes to your efforts. Could I also add one, a very necessary qualification, and that is that although I am a member of the British Labour Party, which is now in Government, my views are not necessarily those of that Government.

Whenever there is a difficulty or hold-ups in the Middle East peace process, many people demand that Europe should do something and Europe's position in the constellation of hopes and expectations in Palestine and in the Arab world seems to go higher the more difficult the situation is. I think it is important that we have a realistic and hard-headed appraisal of just what Europe can do because only by appreciating the limited role Europe can play can we

have a realistic basis for cooperation and expectation. My own view—I would be happy to sustain it in discussion but let me speak telegraphically—is that the optimism, the bright light of expectation which was aroused with the Venice and Madrid statements in the early 1980s, was illusory. There was a brief moment when it appeared that Europe would constructively and consistently follow a line at some deviance from that line pursued by the United States. This aroused considerable optimism in the Arab and Palestinian world and was helpful at that time. Since then, there has been no indication that that initiative taken at Venice and Madrid has been sustained and could be the basis for a genuinely independent policy.

There are various ways of influencing the process of peace in the Palestinian situation. To my mind, the by far most effective is, and would always remain, strong bilateral pressure on Israel rather than multilateral pressure throughout the area. I way that with good evidence and I would take a moment to explain that, indicating and explaining the role the European Parliament can play. By freak really, I think that the European Parliament in the mid-1980s, under the "Single European Act", was given considerable powers when it came to ratifying trade agreements with countries that had an association agreement with the European Union. Association agreement indicates that that country would eventually become a member of the European Union. In times of optimism, e.g., such association agreements were offered and accepted by Turkey and Israel. However, under the Single European Act, the Parliament was given the right to ratify and therefore to veto a trade agreement with a country which had an association agreement. This means that any agreement that Israel has with the European Union has to be ratified by the Parliament and has to gain a majority—50 per cent of those entitled to vote—in order to pass. Parliament discovered this somewhat with shock—at that time I was as I am now the Majority Leader on the Trade Committee—because in December 1987, the Financial Protocol between the European Community, the Union as it now is, and Israel was up for renewal and we were told as parliamentarians that this was simply a technical matter. It wasn't. To some extent, it means updating the treaty to include the membership of Spain and Portugal but also contained a considerable amount of aid in terms of soft loans to Israel. Unfortunately, or fortunately for Parliamentary managers, you will recall that in December 1987, the intifadah broke out. And to cut a long parliamentary story short, Parliament indicated that it would not pass the Financial Protocol with Israel as a sign of distaste for Israel's actions in those events and as a sign of some solidarity for the demand for human rights in the occupied territories.

That was the most solitary experience I personally have ever had because we have always had great difficulty in getting the Israeli Government to take the European Parliament and indeed the European Union that seriously. Their main partner realistically is always the United States of America. But it was quite solitary in the attention that the Israeli State then actually gave the Parliament, having refused point blank to attend the Trade Committee to give evidence and became solicitous about Parliament's opinion. We discovered at that time as well that there was a secret—secret is a wrong word—not too well known and largely hidden from view side protocol that allowed Palestinian goods direct access to the European Union. This is still an issue. There were complaints at that time as right now that Israel was hindering such free trade. Suffice it to say that in holding up the trade agreements, as Parliament did for 10 months, significant concessions were granted by Israel. We went from a situation where in December-January the Israeli Government was refusing to acknowledge that there was a problem, refusing to come to the Trade Committee, to a situation in October 1988 wherein on the eve of the vote in Parliament, the Israeli Minister of Agriculture faxed an agreement between that Ministry and Palestinian growers, granting free access to the European markets, to every single member of the European Parliament. I apologize for spitting it out, proving that bilateral pressure is far more important than declarations.

I would like to report that the European Parliament has continued to operate in a similar way. But I think that Parliament frankly was rather frightened to discover the powers that it has in that respect. But suffice it to say, those powers still remain. Any subsequent agreement between the European Union and Israel, because of Israel's association status, will have to be ratified by the European Parliament and that bilateral pressure point on Israel, I would submit to this Conference, is still the most effective way of improving the human rights situation in Palestine.

I will now move on and mention a couple of other areas of pressure and practical guidance to people here. The European Union does have bilateral programmes for the peace process. The European Union is the major donor of humanitarian aid. It has an annual programme for building on the peace process which is supervised because it has a budgetary side. It is supervised by Parliament and therefore the European Parliament can have a guiding influence on the use of those funds. In that respect, may I underline the words spoken—hinted at—by the Israeli Deputy who spoke before me. I think it is very important in any country but certainly in the Palestinian situation because it is a very large amount of money that is being granted by the European Union that that money is used to build up national capacity in the recipient country and is not used simply to line the pockets of well-meaning but sometimes not particularly well-meaning consultants in the donor country. The European Union has been rightly criticized by its own Court of Auditors for its programmes in Eastern Europe, which saw too high a percentage of its donor funds going into the hands of West European consultants and too little being used actually to build up national capital and national expertise. I would ask all here who have an influence in this matter to make sure that something similar does not happen and that the European Union's aid programme for the peace process is actually used to build national potential, national capital and national expertise amongst the Palestinian people.

The other area as well where there is a point of influence from Europe is the so-called Mediterranean Programme (MEDA), which includes all the non-European as well as European-Mediterranean countries and of which Israel is also a party. That 1995 Barcelona Summit which set up the MEDA Programme made an exhortation on all States to develop good neighbourliness and I think it is very important that the European Union continues, whenever possible, to press upon Israel that under the MEDA Programme, Israel has taken on obligations to act as a good neighbour to its other States. You will know that special measures were passed to enable the Palestinian Authority to be party to the MEDA Programme and that I think was a positive step taken by Europe. I don't think, if I may add a critical note however, that the line pursued by the European Union that the MEDA Programme in developing welfare and economic progress in the wide Mediterranean programme automatically contributes to the peace process. It does only in the vaguest possible way, and that is whenever countries get richer and become more stable, they tend to be more peaceful. But I don't think that there is a magical process by which a quantitive donation of aid and trade to the Mediterranean area magically transposes itself into pressure on Israel to do the decent thing with its Palestinian neighbours and I think we need a harder view of the MEDA Programme than simply thinking that accumulation of aid will automatically transfer itself into peace.

May I just concentrate now my final remarks on what I hope is a realistic although maybe a challenged view of the possibilities of the various European institutions intervening in the peace process. First of all, the Commission does extremely good work. There is no question that the Special Envoy for the peace process, by practicing some shuttle diplomacy in the area, has done an enormous amount of good work. But it is quite clear that as a political body, the Commission has long passed its high watermark which it achieved with Jacques Delors. It seems now quite realistic to assume that the European Commission will not emerge as it seemed to have the potential of doing during the Delors period as a significant political player in the field of foreign affairs and in the field of security.

The second point is the limitations of a common European foreign policy. I would submit and I could give many instances of evidence that the limitations of this are already evident. The Ministers can only act on a lowest common denominator basis, while individual States may and can do much more in pushing for the peace process. Faced with very sharp conflicts, for example in Yugoslavia, the limitations of a common foreign policy have been glaringly obvious. A peace process cannot be made to stick in Yugoslavia without the help of on one side the United States of America and on the other side the Russian Federation, acting as an influence on Serbia. Europe was found quite wanting and its demand that the United States of America and the Russian Federation to a lesser extent stay out of the Yugoslavian process because we were closer in Europe to Yugoslavia and understood it better proved to be a rather vacuous claim. You only need to look at the recent conflict, or almost potential conflict, in Iraq to see that there are quite irreconcilable differences between Member States. My own Government, and not with my approval I must add, took a more hostile line towards Iraq and a more critical line towards the United Nations proposal than for example France did. I think we should be very realistic and say these things exist and base our practical problems or practical solutions on the existence of reality rather than being carried away, as sometimes European politicians are, with the wish that there should be a common foreign policy.

May I conclude with a couple of remarks which I hope will help to move the process on.

1. The States in Europe are still more important than any other desire to have a common policy. Jacques Chirac's visit and his statements and actions in Jerusalem did far more I think for the Palestinian cause than have done ministers in collective statements. The same will probably be true I hope when my own Prime Minister, Tony Blair, visits the area later in the year.

2. The Council will increasingly gain power at the expense of the Commission but the Council can only operate on a lowest common denominator process.

3. I think it is increasingly unlikely that the European Union collectively will take a view that differentiates itself from the United States of America. You may regret that, some of us may work against that, but I think that it is the reality and that the heyday of optimism about Europe being independent as it were which came in Venice and Madrid has gone for the moment.

4. However, Europe, particularly the Commission, will continue to pay for the peace on which it has little influence and as such will do a great deal of good humanitarian work and work which could be better if, taking the line I mentioned before of our Israeli Deputy, is that aid is more concentrated to genuinely building up Palestinian expertise.

5. To repeat my main theme and that is that the bilateral pressure by those of us who wish to force Israel to honour its commitments and do the decent thing by the Palestinian population—bilateral pressure will be far more effective, far more immediate than any wished thinking that the collective European response would achieve the same thing.

HENRY SIEGMAN
DIRECTOR, UNITED STATES/MIDDLE EAST PROJECT
AND SENIOR FELLOW, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

I WILL FOCUS MY BRIEF REMARKS PRIMARILY ON THE UNITED STATES ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS. I SHOULD SAY, HOWEVER, THAT I DO NOT SPEAK FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND INDEED I DO NOT EVEN SPEAK FOR THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS WITH WHICH I AM ASSOCIATED BUT OFFER PERSONAL VIEWS, SHAPED BY MY OWN INVOLVEMENT IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES NOW.

AS HAS BEEN POINTED OUT TIME AND AGAIN DURING THIS CONFERENCE, WE MEET AT A TIME WHEN THE OSLO PROCESS SEEMS HOPELESSLY DEADLOCKED. THE FACT THAT BOTH SIDES ARE OVER TIME ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES THAT VIOLATE ITS SPECIFIC PROVISIONS OF THE OSLO ACCORDS, AND WERE INCONSISTENT WITH ITS VERY PURPOSES AND SURELY ITS SPIRIT, CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT OBSCURE THE FACT, A FUNDAMENTAL FACT, AND THAT IS THAT THE PEACE PROCESS HAS NOT ADVANCED ON ANY FRONT SINCE PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU CAME TO OFFICE WITH THE EXCEPTION, OF COURSE, OF THE HEBRON AGREEMENT, WHICH UNFORTUNATELY TURNED OUT TO BE THE FAMOUS EXCEPTION THAT PROVES THE RULE. AND THIS PRIMARILY AND OVERWHELMINGLY BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU, UNLIKE ITS PREDECESSOR GOVERNMENT, SEES THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN RELATIONSHIP AS A ZERO-SUM GAME. EVERY CONCESSION TO THE PALESTINIANS IS EXPERIENCED BY THIS GOVERNMENT AS A NET LOSS FOR ISRAELI INTERESTS AND ISRAELI SECURITY. PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU AND HIS COLLEAGUES IN HIS CABINET UNFORTUNATELY CANNOT CONCEIVE THAT WHICH PRIME MINISTER RABIN AND MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT CAME TO UNDERSTAND IN 1993. THAT IS, THAT AS IMPORTANT AS TERRITORY IS TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY, EVEN MORE IMPORTANT FOR ISRAEL IS A NEIGHBOUR THAT DOES NOT HARBOUR A DEEP AND FESTERING SENSE OF INJUSTICE OF HAVING BEEN DENIED THE MOST ELEMENTAL REQUISITES OF NATIONAL DIGNITY AND PERSONAL FREEDOM.

NOW LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES, POLITICAL LEADERS WHO HAVE SO LIMITED AND NARROW A VIEW OF THEIR NATION'S SECURITY, FOCUSING SOLELY ON TERRITORIAL AND MILITARY ASSETS, CANNOT BE PEACEMAKERS. WHICH BRINGS US TO THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES, WHOSE FRIENDSHIP WITH THE JEWISH STATE AND SUPPORT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ITS PEOPLE SURELY CANNOT BE QUESTIONED. IN AN IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY ADDRESS THIS PAST AUGUST, THE SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES, MADELEINE ALBRIGHT, RECOGNIZED THE INSEPARABILITY OF PALESTINIAN MEASURES TO ADVANCE THE PEACE PROCESS AND ISRAELI MEASURES THAT ADDRESS THE LEGITIMATE POLITICAL RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS RECOGNITION THAT SHE PROPOSED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT THE PEACE PROCESS COULD NOT PROCEED WITHOUT FIRST ESTABLISHING A VERY CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF GOALS AND A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FINAL SOLUTION; AND THAT BOTH SIDES NEEDED TO AGREE ON THOSE GOALS IF THEY WERE TO REGAIN CONFIDENCE ABOUT WHERE THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS WAS LEADING.

UNFORTUNATELY, MRS. ALBRIGHT, IN THAT IMPORTANT SPEECH, DID NOT PUT FORWARD THE UNITED STATES' OWN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THOSE SPECIFIC GOALS MUST BE. AND AS INDICATED IN THE REPORT THAT WAS ISSUED LAST SUMMER BY AN INDEPENDENT TASK FORCE OF THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS ON UNITED STATES MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND THE PEACE PROCESS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE BETWEEN THE PARTIES IN THIS PEACE PROCESS UNLESS THE DIRECTION AND THE GOAL OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS ARE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD TO INCLUDE PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD. NOW THE DETAILS OF STATEHOOD, THE SPECIFICS OF BORDERS, THE ARRANGEMENTS OF WATER, THE FUTURE OF JERUSALEM, REFUGEES, ETC., THESE DETAILS ARE SUBJECT TO DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES THEMSELVES. BUT THESE NEGOTIATIONS DO NOT BEGIN TO STAND A CHANCE OF SUCCESS. INDEED THEY WOULD BE FUTILE UNLESS IT IS CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY TAKE PLACE WITHIN A CONTEXT THAT IS SURE AS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, STATEHOOD FOR THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE IN THE GAZA AND IN THE WEST BANK.

BUT UNITED STATES INITIATIVE THAT FAILS TO LINK EXPLICITLY PALESTINIAN MEASURES TO FIGHT TERRORISM, WHICH ARE CLEARLY ESSENTIAL, WITH ISRAELI MEASURES THAT MEET PALESTINIAN NEEDS, CAN ONLY REINFORCE THE DEADLOCK. THE UNITED STATES POSITION MUST BE THAT WHILE A WAR ON TERRORISH IS A PRE-CONDITION FOR CONTINUED NEGOTIATIONS, ISRAEL MUST MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE PALESTINIANS TO WAGE THAT WAR BY INDICATING WHAT ISRAEL WILL DO TO ADVANCE SPECIFICALLY WHAT IT WILL DO TO ADVANCE THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE AND PALESTINIAN FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES. MR. ARAFAT'S ROLE CANNOT BE SEEN BY ISRAEL SIMPLY AS SERVING ISRAEL'S SECURITY NEEDS.

A FAR DEEPER AMERICAN ENGAGEMENT THAT TACKLES ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE IS WHAT IS NEEDED NOW TO PUT THE PEACE PROCESS BACK ON TRACK. BOTH PRESIDENT CLINTON AND SECRETARY OF STATE ALBRIGHT SEEM TO HAVE RECOGNIZED THIS IN REALITY AND BOTH HAVE SAID IN RECENT WEEKS THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS MUST INDEED DEFINE THIS GOAL AND FRAMEWORK FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, PRESIDENT CLINTON, IN HIS LAST MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ARAFAT IN WASHINGTON, D.C., SPOKE FOR THE FIRST TIME OF UNITED STATES SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIAN ASPIRATIONS TO LIVE IN FREEDOM. THE UNITED STATES OF COURSE CANNOT COMPEL AN ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO DO WHAT IT IS DETERMINED TO DO, WHAT IT IS DETERMINED NOT TO DO. THE UNITED STATES CANNOT CONTROL MR. NETANYAHU AND HIS POLITICS. BUT THE UNITED STATES CAN CONTROL ITS OWN POLICIES AND CAN DECLARE SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD ALBEIT WITH RESTRICTIONS AND PROVISIONS THAT ARE NECESSARY TO ENSURE ISRAEL'S SECURITY.

A clear and unconditional assertion by the United States as to where the peace process must lead in order to satisfy fundamental requirements on both sides may not yield an immediate breakthrough in the peace process. But it certainly would set broad parameters for the negotiations that the parties sooner or later will have to engage in. It would serve to lessen damage to United States interests in the region, for anger at the United States in the Arab world, which is widespread and which endangers regimes that are friendly to the United States, is the result not of Arab disappointment that the United States has not "delivered Israel" but because rather the United States does not seem to have a position of its own on these important issues. We are therefore seen as acquiescing in the policies of this particular Government.

Having referred however to Arab anger and Arab public opinion on the subject, a subject I have spoken about and written about considerably in the United States and international media, I think that another point needs to be made as well. I must tell you in all candor that as dangerous as it is to ignore Arab public opinion, as so many countries in the West are guilty of, it is equally dangerous to be guilty of uncritical pandering to that public opinion. For Arab public opinion also believes that the spread of AIDS in the Arab world is an Israeli conspiracy, that the alleged liaison between Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton is a Zionist plot, that the holocaust is either grossly exaggerated or never happened, and that Israel is exploiting foodstuffs to the Arab world, e.g., chewing gum, that drive women wild and renders Arab men impotent. Now I mention this and I am glad to see some of you smile but I mention this because these are not the rantings, the delusions, of lunatics. These are reports that appear in responsible, the most important, Arab media and are repeated by ministers, unfortunately in Arab Governments, some of whom are close friends of mine. So I do not believe for all of my reservations about United States policy and for all of my criticism that the policies of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Government that Arab public perceptions of the realities of world affairs should be celebrated uncritically. Too many of them are delusional and pernicious. Like those that are based on traps like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the very hateful and racist book that unfortunately enjoys great popularity even in this day in most Arab countries. None of these I assure you contribute to the credibility of Arab public opinion or to the dignity of the Palestinian cause.

Now having said this, let me say in conclusion that in the end, despite all of these problems on both sides of the ledger, there is no question that there will be a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. To be sure, there will be provisions for demilitarization and other arrangements to deal with the legitimate Israeli security concerns. But it should also be clear that the maps that are now being argued about in Mr. Netanyahu's Cabinet—the Sharon map and the map of the Defence Minister Mordechai—those maps could not be more irrelevant except for the interesting fact but even the most parsimonious proposals in these maps mark a historic turning point because the Likud accepts for the first time the principle of the actual division of land and of returning land to the Palestinians. And it is that principle that will in the end lead inexorably to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and in Gaza. Now the reason for this inevitability is not the effectiveness of the peace process or the genius of the Oslo Accords. The Oslo agreement is deeply flawed although it is clearly the most that could have been achieved at the time. And certainly the peace process that it triggered was not so cleverly contrived as to preclude irreversibility. Now instead, it is the relentless logic of history that will yield the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

The question is not when it will happen and at what further cost to human suffering. The state will emerge not as a reward for Palestinian good behaviour but because at the end of the twentieth century it is simply inconceivable that a people with its own culture, its own faith and political identity can remain under permanent occupation by a Power that is utterly foreign to it. The days when dreams of such permanent foreign rule can be entertained are simply gone forever.

Given the inevitability of the outcome of this tragedy that Israel's current political leadership is so lacking in vision as to fail to understand that resistance to this historic process, even if motivated by practical consideration, creates resentment and bitterness that undermines the very security in whose name the policies are justified. Talk about reciprocity for the Palestinians is a smokescreen, for of course the Israeli list of violations is just as long as that of the Palestinians.

A peace agreement in the end will be possible when Israel's leaders finally accept and understand the truth that granting Palestine freedom and political independence is not a matter of Israeli altruism but an essential precondition for Israel's own security. For these security interests can be dealt with effectively only in a context of negotiations that accept the legitimacy of both sides' basic aspirations. President Clinton and Secretary Albright have come to understand that this context must be the object of United States diplomacy. One must hope now that they will also understand to take the next logical and inevitable step.

MOHAMED ABDELLAH
Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the People's Assembly of Egypt

This meeting is extremely important because, first and foremost, it is a meeting that will support and underpin the role of the United Nations in working for a just solution. This meeting comes to underscore the importance of this gathering that represents all the international bodies and above all the political organizations. This meeting demonstrates the importance that the entire world attaches to one of the flash points of the world that has been an area of crisis for the last 50 years. The original resolution revealed what was really happening and reflected what gone on much earlier in the land of Palestine. It was a reflection of the bloody conflicts fought out in Europe in the Second World War.

We are here to support peace. We have come here to see how to give peace the stamp of international approval. We are here to confirm the fact that a just and lasting peace must go hand in hand because without justice peace cannot be lasting. The deal was land for peace because the acquisition of land by force contravenes the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and so the deal struck was land for peace. We therefore have to look at the principles on which peace is to be based.

A lot of changes came about after the Madrid and Oslo conferences. Hope sprung afresh in the region. We had all gone through mutual fear and denial, rejection, then together we went forward into a stage of mutual recognition. And so we have looked at what we have done and practiced over the past 20 years. We have to be careful to look at the context. It is not just a matter of the settlements being thrown up here and there. It is not a matter of delaying the implementation of the Oslo Accords. It is matter of seeing what is being done overall, to slow down the peace process and to see that it does not go through to a logical conclusion.

The thinking underlines mutual acknowledgement and recognition of what is needed and here I must hail the courage of President Yasser Arafat, who took upon himself the historic responsibility of putting an end to conflict and in so doing showed unheard of boldness and great heartedness. Everything has been endorsed and confirmed by the League of Arab States in the ministerial meeting held just before the Madrid Conference, where accent was placed on the idea that peace was the strategic objective and target of the Arab nation. The Palestinian cause is at the very heart of the conflict and the Palestinian cause is at the very focus of unrest in the Middle East. Comprehensive peace is therefore the proper solution and any resolution calls for a just settlement so that the Palestinian people as a whole can have their rights addressed, so that they can enjoy and exercise them.

Security is necessary but there are resolutions that lay down the total withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Arab territories. Also, we have to look at what is happening in southern Lebanon as well. So when we talk about security, we need first to have peace and any attempt to consider security as an excuse for holding on to land can only continue the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. We have to talk about the conventional concept of security but bringing about a different bluff because if we stick to the old fashion guns of "this is mine and I will defend it", we will get nowhere.

There can be no natural barrier to be seen as a means of preventing war when in fact it could be the very trigger of a war because despair, suffering and discouragement sometimes lead people to violence. Despair has been the cradle of violence. Despair prompts people to violence, provokes them to violence. So closures of borders, keeping people in a more or less state of siege, preventing Palestinians from being able to go to work—this is not going to foster peace. This is not going to further security but will push everyone along the path to opposite directions. We have to adopt a different standpoint, a fresh approach and I think we are going forward into a new attitude and outlook where the legitimacy of the Palestinian claims is being recognized in order to arrive at a proper settlement. This strategic area of the Middle East cannot be a hotbed of conflict.

We have seen that the United Nations has proved effective in the very recent past and has diffused the situation that could have led to an enormous escalation of tension and violence in the Middle East. We congratulate the Secretary-General of the United Nations but we have to say that it is the will of peoples that was the decisive factor because the peoples are tired of war and violence and conflict. We look forward optimistically to seeing this year as the year in which there will be adherence to principle so that the peace process can be revived and put back on track in order to obtain the objectives it set itself.

I am not going to mention all of the resolutions with which are you are already familiar. I should like to talk to you about a situation that can flag danger but you are familiar with that too. It is a global village, we all say nowadays. It's a small world and no one can disregard or be unaware of what is happening in the field. But I will talk about one aspect—certain concepts that can offer a different view. I am not speaking as a United Nations expert but as a politician and I can say that we have to look to the future. Our point of departure has to be what we all have already done because a great deal has been done. We have hesitated at times between peace and other solutions

because of the stalemate, the deadlock, but we have to try and foresee the unforeseeable. We have to do this by founding our action on the proper basis for peace. We have to look at peace within Israel and recognize that there is a peace movement inside that country and so that we can see in every international meeting all those who wish to build peace coming together to give practical expression to those ideas.

We have to look to peace beyond peace—the peace that can consolidate peace and practice if you like. This is the conceptive—this is the post-peace movement idea in a new Middle East, founded on the building of a Middle East without weapons of mass destruction, a region that will be an example for peaceful co-existence, a Middle East that is the very cradle of civilization and divine revelation, of tolerance and cooperation, a very model of a new society that will be built for a new and better future. This, of course, is related directly to the security of Europe and indeed the world. For this reason, our meeting here under the auspices of the United Nations, in a European city, the very heart of Europe, is a clear message that must be understood by everyone that seeks peace, by all peace-loving peoples because what is sought is universal, worldwide peace and security. We must see to it that the Middle East which has suffered so much in successive wars can become an exemplar of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among differing people and differing views.

V. CLOSING MEETING

JEAN DE RUYT
Director-General of Multilateral Policy
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium

The Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in collaboration with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, is drawing to a close today, but there still remains a need to work for the urgent revival of the Middle East peace process, in all its topicality and complexity.

Throughout the Conference, one eminent speaker after another has stressed the compelling need to revive the peace process. By combining all our efforts in pursuit of this fundamental goal, we will be able to reduce the risk of this process stagnating or going adrift. We must mobilize all our energies very rapidly to this end.

I should like to point out, first of all, that, in his statement of 5 February, the Secretary-General of the United Nations announced his intention to travel to the Middle East in order to hold discussions there with the leaders in the region concerning the role which the United Nations should play in order to give greater support to the peace efforts. We understand very well why this visit has been postponed and we hope that, as Sir Kieran Prendergast, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, confirmed to us yesterday, Kofi Annan will be able to carry out this mission in the near future. I can only support the Secretary-General's statement that peace can be attained only through a spirit of conciliation that will lead to the recognition of the legitimate rights and needs of all parties. Prior commitments must be fully respected and unilateral acts that undermine confidence must be avoided.

I should also like to note that, in his statement, Ibra Deguène Ka, to whom I wish to pay tribute here for the very efficient way in which he discharges his duties as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, very rightly stressed the purpose of this Conference, which is to strengthen the mobilization of European and international public opinion in support of the revival of the peace process and respect for the rights of the Palestinian people.

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Erik Derycke, said during the opening meeting, Belgium deeply regrets that the peace process has been stalled for nearly a year and believes that it is crucial and urgent to revive it through the full implementation of the provisions of the interim Israeli-Palestinian agreements. The delays in the implementation of the agreements which have been duly signed by the parties continue to poison the atmosphere of negotiations. We cannot stress often enough that the principle of land for peace is the essential element of a future peace.

During this Conference, a number of speakers have rightly referred to the celebration in 1998 of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This provides an occasion for all of us to recall this solemn commitment, which continues to be of vital significance to the Palestinian people.

The importance which the European Union and Belgium attach to the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people is well known and is based on positions that have been, for the most part, developed in recent decades.

Moreover, it is not political support alone. Indeed, our steadfast support has also been reflected in a considerable financial investment in various programmes of assistance to the Palestinians in order to help them to establish the necessary structures, build a solid democracy and ensure their economic and social development, with a view to establishing in the Palestinian territories in the future, the economic stability which is essential to political stability.

Despite this major financial effort by the European Union and all its member States, including Belgium, it must be noted that the economic and social situation in the occupied territories has undergone a disturbing deterioration in recent years. This is apparent from the macroeconomic indicators which are available and from a recent communication from the Commission of the European Union.

This paradoxical reality - the decline of the Palestinian economy despite a substantial flow of assistance - cannot fail to cause concern.

We deem it urgent to rectify this deplorable situation because it is not acceptable that the Palestinians should be faced with a decline in their standard of living of some 30 per cent since the signature of the Oslo agreements.

We believe that the stalemate in the peace process and the restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals and goods in the occupied territories are largely responsible for the problems faced by the Palestinian economy.

As you doubtless know, the European Union recently entered into a dialogue with Israel on the problems confronting the Palestinian economy in order to explore ways and means of stimulating the Palestinian economy and minimizing the adverse impact of the border closings and other obstacles. We can only express our fervent hope that these measures, which imply a more active role for the Union in the peace process, will have a tangible impact on the very difficult situation in which the population of the occupied territories finds itself at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

In this connection, I should like to refer to the statement of President Arafat. As he reminded us, in two years' time, we will be celebrating the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Palestinian town of Bethlehem. A preparatory conference for the Bethlehem festivities will, moreover, be held in Brussels next April.

I hope that the prospect of this anniversary will be a powerful stimulus for each of the actors involved in the search for a solution to the conflict in the Middle East and for the peoples of the region. Peace, admittedly, requires some sacrifices if the necessary compromises are to be reached, but the benefits of peace fully justify the concessions that must be made in order to achieve it.

M. NASSER AL-KIDWA
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

It is my honour, on behalf of the Palestinian leadership, as we are coming to the closing of our meeting, to convey to you all our deepest gratitude for participating in this important conference. We thank most particularly the Belgian Government, our friends, for having hosted this conference. We also thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ibra Deguène Ka. Quite naturally, we thank the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and we should also like to express our gratitude for the participation of the Secretary-General of the Organization, Azzedine Laraki.

Our conference is being held in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people so that these rights can be exercised because this is the lynchpin to the peace process in the Middle East. This conference as was so rightly said by many previous speakers, is being held at a very timely moment because this is the fiftieth anniversary of the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their lands and this is the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Principles, the Agreements of Principles. This conference has engendered important results reflecting international unanimity. This has emphasized the strengthening of the rights of the Palestinian people and the practical expression of those rights and the revival of the peace process in the Middle East so as to ensure proper results. Secondly and thirdly, the basis of international law and the role of the United Nations in the Middle East have been underscored. Without a doubt there was added importance because of the presence of President Yasser Arafat at this conference.

This clearly marked the Palestinian position despite the ferocious Israeli campaign to undermine all positions. A great many organizations and countries have taken part and there has been official participation from the European partners in some numbers. We are most grateful to Belgium, in the heart of Europe, for providing this venue and this opportunity. The importance of the conference has become increasingly clear and has been enhanced because of major regional organizations involved and also because of United Nations involvement.

The Palestinian people will continue its endeavours to choose the peace option in the Middle East and refuse any measure that run counter to their rightful aspirations. How can we implement the provisions of international law? Is Israel going to remain the spoiled child that stand outside the law and indeed apparently above the law, internationally speaking. Has not the time now come for Israel to be denied all sorts of help and support given what is going in the occupied territories and be made to withdraw from them?

In the light of the relevant United Nations resolutions concerning the rights of the Palestinians, this world forum can confer proper legitimacy. It is up to us to confirm that the United Nations resolutions are the landmarks, are the points of reference with regard to the implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, who must be allowed to exercise them in full. The united Arab world wishes to sound a note of warning against any attempt to change or amend international resolutions adopted in the past 50 years. Those resolutions and decisions are the reference framework for the exercise by the Palestinian people of self-determination and other inalienable rights. Any such attempt to change or amend would in and of itself be extremely dangerous. It would be an attempt to wipe out human history and to rewrite human memories. What we must do in the Middle East is to seek to confirm peace and to push peace forward.

In closing, I wish to convey greetings to all of you and to anyone and all those who raised their voices in peace and for the rights of the Palestinian people.

IBRA DEGUENE KA
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

We have come here to Brussels to share our concerns and to exchange views on a very important set of issues pertaining to the rights of the Palestinian people, its living conditions and the recurrent problems faced by the Middle East peace process. We, representatives of Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, were driven by a strong desire to contribute to international efforts aimed at saving the peace process, alleviating the living conditions of the Palestinian people and realizing its inalienable rights.

Today, we conclude the two days of our deliberations. On behalf of the organizers of the Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to say how impressed we were with the quality, seriousness and openness of our deliberations.

Having listened to the interesting and very insightful presentations made by all of our distinguished participants, the organizers felt that they could make an effort to reflect the general thrust of the deliberations in their concluding remarks. I was requested by the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States to present these observations at the closing session of the Conference.

I would like once again to extend the most sincere gratitude of the organizers to all the participants, the representatives of donor and other Governments, the United Nations system organizations, as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations for making these two days of work productive and useful.

Allow me also, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, to thank again the Government of Belgium, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the facilities made available to us and for the support provided for the Conference. And, of course, I wish to thank the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights, as well as of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Information Centre and the United Nations Development Programme office in Brussels for their tireless work and assistance to the Organizers.

Also allow me also, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to express the Committee's gratitude to the Secretaries-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their cooperation and dedicated involvement in organizing this Conference. The report of the Conference will be prepared by its secretariat at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE ORGANIZERS

1. The Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held at Brussels on 24 and 25 February 1998, coincided with the passage of 50 years since the beginning of the dispossession of the Palestinian people, as well as 30 years of the occupation of Palestinian lands in 1967 and 10 years since the start of the intifadah, the uprising of the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. September 1998 will also mark five years since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The aim of the Conference was to draw the world's attention to the continuing unjust and appalling situation faced by the Palestinian people, to the aggravating economic and social circumstances in the occupied Palestinian territories and to the threats and dangers to the whole region resulting from Israel's policies, practices and measures.

2. The Middle East peace process, which raised great hopes, has come to a stalemate due to the numerous setbacks and obstacles placed by the Israeli Government, its non-compliance with international law, United Nations resolutions and the agreements signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization, its inhuman practices and measures violating the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the continuation of its expansionist policy of illegal settlements, its attempts to alter the demographic, historical and cultural character and status of the Holy City of Al-Quds (Jerusalem), the economic blockade of the Palestinian territory, thus hampering the development efforts of the Palestinian people.

3. Whilst the world is celebrating in 1998 the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, those of the Palestinian people continue to be denied by Israel and resolutions of the United Nations are being violated with impunity.

4. The participation in the Conference of many high-level governmental delegations, eminent personalities and representatives of United Nations bodies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations demonstrated the continued support by the international community of the Middle East peace process, based on the principle of land for peace and aimed at implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable national rights and at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The Conference also showed the determination of the international community to intensify its efforts to set the peace process back on all tracks, including the Syrian and the Lebanese ones. The organizers called upon the parties to abide by their contractual obligations under the agreements reached and to implement those agreements in a timely manner towards the realization of a final settlement. At this critical juncture, they also called upon the co-sponsors of the peace process to spare no effort in order to save it.

5. The Conference showed overwhelming support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of their State, and reaffirmed that this is a primary prerequisite for the successful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the crux of which is the question of Palestine. The Conference underlined that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, including Al-Quds (Jerusalem), must be brought to an end without delay and mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence must be given an opportunity to flourish.

6. The organizers emphasized the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine till it is resolved in all its aspects in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy and until peace is finally achieved. They expressed their appreciation for the role that the United Nations has been playing in this regard. They reaffirmed the crucial importance of the respective roles of their Organizations and agreed to continue their efforts within and outside the United Nations, in accordance with their respective mandates, with a view to achieving this objective. They called upon all participants to contribute to enhance their Governments' and the public opinion' awareness to the plight of the Palestinian people and to the need to enable them to exercise their inalienable rights.

7. The organizers expressed their appreciation to the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of African Unity for their continued assistance to and unflinching support of the Palestinian people. They were also grateful to the members of the European Union for their positive position and invaluable economic assistance to the Palestinian people. They also called upon the international community to persist in this important endeavour.

8. The organizers welcomed the participation in the Conference of Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority. They expressed their deep appreciation for his sustained efforts and wise leadership in the quest for a peaceful solution of the question of Palestine, as well as a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

9. The organizers expressed their deep appreciation and profound gratitude to the Government of Belgium for having given them the opportunity to hold this Conference and to raise the above-mentioned concerns in Brussels, the heart of Europe.

VII. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Governments

Albania	Grigor Dhaskali, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Algeria	Mohamed Lamari, Ambassador to Belgium Azzedine Alloun, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Angola	Manuel Vieira da Fonseca, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Argentina	D. Mario Cámpora, Ambassador to Belgium Vicente Salas Martínez, First Secretary
Australia	Jaane Drake-Brockman, Chargé d'affaires Alex Brooking, Counsellor Embassy in Brussels
Austria	Andreas Riecken, Counsellor Permanent Observer Mission of Austria to the Western European Union, Brussels Walter Grahammer, Minister, Deputy Head of Mission to Belgium
Bangladesh	Khairul Anam, Ambassador to Belgium, Head of delegation Syed Shah Mohammad Ali, Minister Shafiqul Islam Embassy in Belgium
Belarus	Aliaksandr Baichorov Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary Embassy in Belgium
Belgium	Pierre Labouverie, Director, Middle East Division Ministry of Foreign Affairs Head of Delegation Wilfried Geens, Director United Nations Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Boudewijn Dereymaeker, Counsellor Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Benin	Aboudou Saliou, Ambassador to Belgium Ogoudjobi Sikirou, Minister Counsellor Hinvi Eulogie, Minister Counsellor
Bolivia	Mr. Horacio Bazoberry, Minister Counsellor, Chargé d'affaires, a.i. Embassy in Belgium
Brazil	Washington Luis Pereira de Sousa, Minister Counsellor Mr. Jorge Karl de Sá Earp, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Brunei Darussalam	Dato Kassim Daud, Ambassador to Belgium Norazlinah Ibrahim, Second Secretary
Burundi	Léonidas Ndoricimpa, Ambassador to Belgium
Cameroon	Isabelle Bassong, Ambassador to Belgium Iya Tidjani, Minister Counsellor Ndjodo Casimir, Cultural Counsellor

Canada	Georges Béchard, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Cape Verde	Jose Luis Rocha, Ambassador to Belgium Hercules Cruz, Chargé d'affairs Embassy in Belgium
Chile	Hugo Cubillos Bravo, Ambassador to Belgium Carlos Parker, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Colombia	Carlos Lemos Simmonds, Vice President of Colombia José Antonio Vargas Lleras, Ambassador to Belgium Diego Cardona C., Minister Plenipotentiary, Embassy in Belgium Diego Zuleta Lleras, Adviser to the Vice President Lieutenant Commander Reynaldo Espinosa H., Aide-de-Camp to the Vice President Mauricio Avila Rodriguez, First Secretary, Embassy in Belgium Georges Attal, Counsellor Pierre Creysson, Attaché Anne Flonneau, Attaché
Croatia	Sandra Sekuluc, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Cuba	René Juan Mujica Cantelar, Ambassador to Belgium Francisco Alfonso Ledesma, Commercial and Economic Counsellor, Embassy in Belgium Silvia Blanca Nogales, Third Secretary Loipa Sanchez Lorenzo, Third Secretary
Cyprus	Christodoulos Pasiardis, Director Division of Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs James Droushiotis, Counsellor Deputy Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations
Czech Republic	Richard Huk, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Denmark	Kresten Due, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Ecuador	Mentor Villagómez, Minister Embassy in Belgium
Egypt	Mounir Zahran, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations Office at Geneva Raouf Saad, Ambassador to Belgium Khaled Youssef, Second Secretary Embassy in Belgium Mohamed Abdellah, Chairman, Foreign Relations Committee
Ethiopia	Peter Gabriel Robleh Ambassador to the Benelux Countries and the European Union Assefa Delil, Second Secretary Mission to the Benelux Countries and the European Union
Fiji	Kaliopate Tavola, Aambassador to Belgium
Finland	Eero Ailio, Second Secretary

France	Anne Vidal de la Blache, Second Counsellor Embassy in Belgium Jean Hannoyer, North Africa-Middle East Division Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Gambia	O. A. Touray, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium Salimatta E. Touray, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Georgia	Karhaber Gogolashvili, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Germany	Harro Adt, Minister Counsellor Gottfried Naagel, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Ghana	Jacob Botwe Wilmot, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Head of delegation Robert Tachie-Menson, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Greece	Polyxeni Petropoulou, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Guyana	Havelock Brewster, Ambassador to Belgium George Hallaq, Special Envoy to the Middle East
Hungary	Balázs Bokor, Ambassador, Deputy Director General, Minister of Foreign Affairs
India	Yogendra Kumar, Minister S. Bagchi, Second Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Indonesia	I.G.N.K. Sumantera, Ambassador to Belgium Ali Margono, Minister Counsellor John Pareira, Political Affairs Staff Aji Ifsan Adil, Political Affairs Staff
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Hamid Aboutalebi, Ambassador to Belgium Hamid Eslamizad, Third Counsellor Masoud Gharanfoli, First Secretary
Iraq	Tarik M. Yahya, Chargé d'affaires Hussein Abid Baqur, Third Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Ireland	Jim Carroll, Deputy Regional Director Middle East
Israel	Amira Dotan, Spokesperson Embassy in Belgium
Italy	Diego Brasioli, Counsellor Deputy Head of the Middle East Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Japan	Keiisuki Senta, First Secretary Mission to the European Union Koji Abe, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium

Jordan	Ibrahim Badran Department of Palestinian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Umayya S. Toukan, Ambassador to Belgium and the European Union Sa'ed Radaideh, Third Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Kazakhstan	Abtynbek Yegizbayev, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Kuwait	Ahmad Al-Ebrahim, Ambassador to Belgium Head of delegation Waleed Al-Kandari, First Secretary Muteb Al-Mutoteh, Third Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Latvia	Gints Apals, First Secretary
Lebanon	Jihad Mortada, Ambassador to Belgium Hassan Abi Akar, Counsellor Ishaya El-Khouri, Counsellor
Lesotho	Retselisitsoe Victor Lechesa, Ambassador to Belgium Potlako P. Nzima-Ntsekhe, Counsellor Masingoaneng Motanyane
Libya	Hamed Ahmed El Houderi Secretary of the Arab Libyan People's Bureau to the Benelux Countries Chief of the Mission to the European Union Ambassador to the European Union
Malawi	J. N. Mphande Ambassador to the European Union M. M. Z. Njolwa, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
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Mali	N'Tji Laïco Traore, Ambassador to Belgium
Malta	Victor Camilleri Ambassador to Belgium and the European Communities Marlene Bonnici, First Secretary
Mauritania	Boullah Ould Mogueye, Ambassador to Belgium
Mauritius	Parrwiz Cassim Hossen, Ambassador to Belgium
Mexico	Manuel Armendáriz, Ambassador to the European Community Rafael Cervantes, Minister Eduardo Menache, Second Secretary
Morocco	Rachad Bouhlal
Mozambique	Sergio Baloi, Second Secretary Embassy in Brussels
Namibia	Zedekia J. Ngavirue Embassy in Belgium
Nepal	Kedar Bhakta, Ambassador to Belgium Madhavji Shrestha, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium

Netherlands	Bijdoet Franciscus Gijsbertas
Nicaragua	Nohelia Perez Quintana, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Niger	Housseini Abdou-Saleye, Ambassador to Belgium Bazindre Almoumine, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Oman	Mohammed bin Sultan Al-Busaidi, Ambassador to France
Pakistan	Riaz Mohammad Khan, Ambassador to Belgium Head of delegation Syed Hasan Javed, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Paraguay	Manuel Cacares, Ambassador to Belgium Lourdes Rivas, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Peru	Alvaro Ganoza, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Philippines	Elizabeth P. Buensuceso, Minister Counsellor Chargé d'affaires, a.i., Embassy in Belgium
Poland	Jan Wojciech Piekarski, Ambassador to Belgium
Portugal	Fatima Perestaello, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Qatar	Ali Sultan Al-Zaman, Director of the Department of Organizations, Conferences and International Accords, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nasser Al-Khalifa, Ambassador to the United Nations Mohamed Al-Hayiki, Chargé d'affaires Embassy in Belgium
Romania	Mihai Stefan Stuparu, Director for Middle East and North Africa Ministry of Foreign Affairs Razvan Victor Rusu, Assistant Attaché Ministry of Foreign Affairs Corneliu Iorgulescu, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Russian Federation	Alexander Shein, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Saudi Arabia	Nassir Alassaf, Ambassador to Belgium Osama Al-Dohar, First Secretary Mohammed Madani, First Secretary Mohammad-Rajai Barakat, Researcher Embassy in Belgium
Senegal	Cherif Younouss Diaité, Ambassador Director of the Cabinet of the Minister for Foreign Affairs Saloum Kandé, Ambassador to Belgium
Slovakia	Elena Letková, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Slovenia	Jasa Zlobec-Lukic, Ambassador to Belgium Mr. Dubravka Sekoranja, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium

South Africa	L. N. Sisulu, Deputy Minister of Home Affairs François Hugo, Administrative Secretary Schoeman Du Plessis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Spain	José Miguel Muro Martinez, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Sri Lanka	C. F. Chinniah, Minister Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Sudan	Galal H. Atabani, Ambassador to Belgium
Sweden	Niklas Kebbon, Second Secretary Embassy in Belgium
Syria Arab Republic	Hani Habeeb, Ambassador to Belgium Adib Khani, Minister Plenipotentiary Zouheir Jabbour, Counsellor
Thailand	Penprapa Vongkovit, First Secretary Pichit Boonsud, Second Secretary Embassy in Belgium
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Dusan Stojanov, Minister Counsellor Mission to the European Communities Zoran Stojcevski, Third Secretary
Tunisia	Sadok Fayala, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Tahar Sioud, Ambassador to Belgium Mohamed Fawzi Blout, Counsellor
Trinidad and Tobago	J. André Laveau, Second secretary Embassy in Belgium
Turkey	Faruk Logoglu, Deputy Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sermet Ülker, First Secretary Beste Pehlivan, Attaché
Ukraine	Hennadiy U. Udovenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs Head of Delegation Valeri Kuchinsky, Director, Department of International Organizations Ministry of Foreign Affairs Borys Tarasyuk, Ambassador to Belgium Serhiy Kyslytsya, First Secretary, Embassy in Belgium Dina Martina, Third Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Olexandr Tymoshenko, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
United Arab Emirates	Ahmad Mahmoud Ghaith Al-Hosani, Director Department of Arab Homeland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Head of Delegation Yousuf Al-Hassan, Counsellor Department of Legal Affairs and Studies Ministry of Foreign Affairs Saqer Nasser Alraisi, First Secretary, Embassy to Belgium Hassan Ahmad Al-Shehi, First Secretary Department of Arab Homeland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Edward Glover, Deputy Head of Mission Embassy in Belgium
United Republic of Tanzania	Helen Kafumba, First Secretary Embassy in Belgium

United States of America	William R. Regan First Secretary of the Mission to the European Union
Uruguay	Alicia Plata, First Secretary Mission to the European Communities
Venezuela	Arturo Berti Cupella, Counsellor Embassy in Belgium
Viet Nam	Huynh Anh Dzung Ambassador to the European Communities
Yemen	Gazem Abdul Khaleq Al-Aghbari Ambassador to Belgium Ali Zorkot, Secretary
Zimbabwe	Simbarashe S. Mumbengegwi Ambassador to the European Union Jonathan Wutawunashe, Deputy Head of Mission Ignatius Kamba, Counsellor

Other organizations having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly and maintaining permanent observer missions at Headquarters

Palestine	Mr. Yasser Arafat Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority
	Farouk Kaddoumi Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization
	Nabeel Shaath Minister for Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority
	Marwan Kanafani Adviser
	Nabil Abu Rudeineh Adviser
	Chawki Armali General Delegate of Palestine to Belgium
	Hisham El-Farra Economic Advisor Palestinian Authority
	Fathi El Mohor Deputy Director General Delegation of Palestine to Belgium
	Ahmad Abdelrazek Deputy General Delegate to France
	Tadros Noha Political Department
	Khellef Yasser Political Department

Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Sir Kieran Prendergast
Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs

Delegation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Ibra Deguène Ka
Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations
Chairman of the Committee

Bruno E. Rodríguez Parrilla
Permanent Representative of Cuba
to the United Nations
Vice-Chairman of the Committee

Ravan Farhadi
Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations
Vice-Chairman of the Committee

George Saliba
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations
Rapporteur of the Committee

M. Nasser Al-Kidwa
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

Delegation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Azzedine Laraki
Secretary-General

Abdulaziz Aboughosh
Assistant Secretary-General

Boubou Niang
Deputy Director of the Cabinet

Ahmed Tazi
Adviser to the Secretary-General

Nureddine Mezni
Adviser to the Secretary-General

Bilal Sasso
Al-Quds and Palestine Department

Delegation of the League of Arab States

Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid
Secretary-General

Said Kamal
Assistant Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs

Brahim Ben Barka
Head of the Mission, Brussels

Sayed Torbey
Chargé d'affaires
Administration and Finance

Djanet El-Mokrani
Press and Information

Eminent persons

Ahmad Mohammed Ali
President, Islamic Development Bank

Shulamit Aloni
Meretz Party
Former Minister of Education of Israel

Harry G. Barnes, Jr.
Director
Conflict Resolution and Human Rights Programs
The Carter Center

Michael Hindley
Member of the European Parliament
and Co-Chairman of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation

Nabil Shaath
Minister of Planning and International Cooperation
Palestinian Authority

Mr. Henry Siegman
Director, United States/Middle East Project and Senior Fellow
Council on Foreign Relations

United Nations organs, agencies and bodies

General Assembly	Hennadiy U. Udovenko, President of the General Assembly Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	M. R. de Montalembert Director, Liaison Office, Brussels A. Matton Liaison Officer, Brussels
International Fund for Agricultural Development	Mohamme Hassani
United Nations Development Programme	Diana Moli, Assistant to the Director Laurent Pierandrei, Adviser
United Nations Environment Programme	Makram Gerges Regional Director for West Asia
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Daniel Janicot Assistant Director-General for the Directorate O. Massalha, Director Coordination Unit for Action in Favour of the Palestinian People

United Nations Population Fund	Mohammed Mazouz UNFPA Global Programme, Brussels Official Representative to the European Community
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Abdelhamid El Ouali Senior Legal Adviser
World Food Programme	Guiseppe Lubatti Senior Liaison Officer
World Health Organization	Dr. André Prost Head of Mission Representative of the Director General

Intergovernmental organizations

European Commission	Karin Johansson Desk Officer West Bank and Gaza Strip
	Maryem Van den Heuvel Isabel Candela Diego de Ojeda Garance Wattez
European Union	Chris Innes-Hopkins Political Adviser to the European Union Special Envoy to the Middle East Peace Process
Islamic Development Bank	Mansour Feten Chief Chief Operations Division III
Organization of African Unity	Mohamoud Abdi Daar Deputy Director of the OAU Office, Belgium

Special guests

Anne-Marie Lizin
Senator
Belgium

Hannu Halinen
Ambassador
Finnish Embassy
Berlin

Luc Sevenhans
Member of Parliament
Belgium

NGO observers

Al-Sharq al-Awsat
London

Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization
Cairo

Arab Lawyers Union
Cairo

Arab Organization for Human Rights
Cairo

Asian Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine
New Delhi

Association Luxembourgeoise pour les Nations Unies
Luxembourg

Belgian-Palestinian Association
Brussels, Belgium

Bilance

Comité Luxembourgeois de soutien au peuple palestinien
Luxembourg

Comité de Vigilance pour une paix Réelle au Proche-Orient

Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding
London

Enfants-Réfugiés du Monde
Montreuil

Euro-Palestinian Economic and Consultancy Unit
Brussels

French Platform for Palestine
Paris

Gesellschaftsanalyse und Politische Bildung e.V.
Berlin

Greek Committee for International Democratic Solidarity
Athens
(Member of European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine)

International Jewish Peace Union
Paris

Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation
Brussels

International Progress Organization
Vienna

International Union of Family Organizations
Curitiba-Paraná-Brazil

Justice and Peace Commission

Law - The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment
Shufat, Jerusalem

Lutfia Rabbani Foundation
The Hague, Netherlands

Medical Aid for Palestinians
London

Medico International
Oberursel, Germany

Najdeh
Hannover, Germany

National Centre for Cooperation and Development
Brussels

North American Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine
Madison, New Jersey, United States of America

North-South XXI
Geneva

Oxfam Solidarite
Brussels

Palestine Council for Justice and Peace
Ramallah-Jerusalem

Pax Christi International
Brussels

POLLEN

Portuguese Council for Peace and Cooperation
Lisbon

Radio Al Manar
Brussels

Radio Orient
Paris

Save the Children Fund (UK)
London

Society for Austro-Arab Relations
Vienna

Spanish NGO Committee on the Question of Palestine (IEPALA)
Madrid

UNA-Belgium

Union of International Associations
Brussels

United Towns Organization
Paris

Vlaams Palestina Komitee
Brussels

World Alliance of YMCAs
Geneva

World Muslim Congress
Islamabad, Pakistan

World Vision
Brussels

World Young Women's Christian Association
Geneva

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